DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 448 069 SO 031 884

AUTHOR	Harris, Laurie Lanzen, Ed.; Abbey, Cherie D., Ed.
TITLE	Biography Today: Profiles of People of Interest to Young Readers. Author Series, Volume 7.
ISBN	ISBN-0-7808-0413-9
PUB DATE	2000-00-00
NOTE	215p.; For related volumes, see ED 390 725 and ED 434 064.
AVAILABLE FROM	Omnigraphics, Inc., 615 Griswold Street, Detroit, MI 48226. Tel: 800-234-1340 (Toll Free); Web site: http://www.omnigraphics.com/.
PUB TYPE	Books (010) -- Reports - Descriptive (141)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC09 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	*Adolescent Literature; *Authors; Biographies; Childrens Literature; Elementary Secondary Education; Language Arts; Popular Culture; Profiles; Reading Interests; Reading Materials; Recreational Reading; Social Studies; Student Interests; Supplementary Reading Materials
IDENTIFIERS	*Biodata; *Illustrators; Writing for Children

ABSTRACT

This book presents biographical profiles of 10 authors of interest to readers ages 9 and above and was created to appeal to young readers in a format they can enjoy reading and readily understand. Biographies were prepared after extensive research, and each volume contains a cumulative index, a general index, a place of birth index, and a birthday index. Each profile provides at least one picture of the individual and information on birth, youth, early memories, education, first jobs, marriage and family, career highlights, memorable experiences, hobbies, and honors and awards. All entries end with a list of easily accessible sources designed to lead the student to further reading on the individual. Volume 7 features the following authors: William H. Armstrong (Obituary, 1914-1999); Patricia Reilly Giff (1935-); Langston Hughes (Retrospective, 1902-1967); Stan Lee (1922-); Julius Lester (1939-); Robert Pinsky (1940-); Todd Strasser (1950-); Jacqueline Woodson (1964?-); Patricia C. Wrede (1953-); and Jane Yolen (1939-). (LB)

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Biography Today: Profiles of People of Interest to Young Readers. Author Series, Volume 7, 2000.

Harris, Laurie Lanzen, Ed.
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Vol. 7

Biography Today

Profiles of People of Interest to Young Readers

Author Series

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Julius Lester
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Biography Today

Profiles of People of Interest to Young Readers

Author Series

Volume 7

Laurie Lanzen Harris
Executive Editor

Cherie D. Abbey
Co-Editor

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ISBN 0-7808-0413-9

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This book is printed on acid-free paper meeting the ANSI Z39.48 Standard. The infinity symbol that appears above indicates that the paper in this book meets that standard.

Printed in the United States

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Preface

Welcome to the seventh volume of the **Biography Today Author Series**. We are publishing this series in response to the growing number of suggestions from our readers, who want more coverage of more people in *Biography Today*. Several volumes, covering **Artists, Authors, Scientists and Inventors, Sports Figures, and World Leaders,** have appeared thus far in the Subject Series. Each of these hardcover volumes is 200 pages in length and covers approximately 12 individuals of interest to readers ages 9 and above. The length and format of the entries will be like those found in the regular issues of *Biography Today,* but there is **no duplication** between the regular series and the special subject volumes.

The Plan of the Work

As with the regular issues of *Biography Today,* this special subject volume on **Authors** was especially created to appeal to young readers in a format they can enjoy reading and readily understand. Each volume contains alphabetically arranged sketches. Each entry provides at least one picture of the individual profiled, and bold-faced rubrics lead the reader to information on birth, youth, early memories, education, first jobs, marriage and family, career highlights, memorable experiences, hobbies, and honors and awards. Each of the entries ends with a list of easily accessible sources designed to lead the student to further reading on the individual and a current address. Obituary entries are also included, written to provide a perspective on the individual's entire career. Obituaries are clearly marked in both the table of contents and at the beginning of the entry.

Biographies are prepared by Omnigraphics editors after extensive research, utilizing the most current materials available. Those sources that are generally available to students appear in the list of further reading at the end of the sketch.

Indexes

Beginning with all publications in 1999, a new Index appeared in *Biography Today*. In an effort to make the index easier to use, we have combined the **Name** and **General Index** into one, called the **General Index**. This new index contains the names of all individuals who have appeared in *Biography Today* since the series began. The names appear in bold faced type, followed

by the issue in which they appeared. The General Index also contains the occupations and ethnic and minority origins of individuals profiled. The General Index is cumulative, including references to all individuals who have appeared in the *Biography Today* General Series and the *Biography Today* Special Subject volumes since the series began in 1992.

The Birthday Index and Places of Birth Index will continue to appear in all Special Subject volumes.

Our Advisors

This volume was reviewed by an Advisory Board comprised of librarians, children's literature specialists, and reading instructors so that we could make sure that the concept of this publication—to provide a readable and accessible biographical magazine for young readers—was on target. They evaluated the title as it developed, and their suggestions have proved invaluable. Any errors, however, are ours alone. We'd like to list the Advisory Board members, and to thank them for their efforts.

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Our Advisory Board stressed to us that we should not shy away from controversial or unconventional people in our profiles, and we have tried to follow their advice. The Advisory Board also mentioned that the sketches might be useful in reluctant reader and adult literacy programs, and we would value any comments librarians might have about the suitability of our magazine for those purposes.

Your Comments Are Welcome

Our goal is to be accurate and up-to-date, to give young readers information they can learn from and enjoy. Now we want to know what you think. Take a look at this issue of *Biography Today*, on approval. Write or call me with your comments. We want to provide an excellent source of biographical information for young people. Let us know how you think we're doing.

Laurie Harris
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OBITUARY

William H. Armstrong 1914-1999

American Teacher and Author of Books for Young Adults
Winner of the 1970 Newbery Medal for *Sounder*

BIRTH

William Howard Armstrong was born on September 14, 1914, in Lexington, Virginia. He was the third of four children born to Howard Gratton Armstrong and Ida (Morris) Armstrong. William had three sisters, Ashley, Coreta, and Glenden.

"All that could be called a library in our school was a short shelf in each room, a place for not more than a dozen books. Visiting elementary schools today brings a lump to my throat. . . . I tell my audiences, usually sixth and seventh graders, that if I had by some magic been transported to such a library when I was their age, I wouldn't have gone home when school was out. I would have been reading until the last door was locked against me."

YOUTH

Armstrong grew up on his family's farm in Collierstown, Virginia, where his parents taught him the value of discipline and hard work. In addition to chores on the farm, he worked at a variety of odd jobs as a boy. For example, he fed cattle, trapped rats, and raked leaves for neighbors. He also sold magazine subscriptions and met the mail train and carried the mail to his town.

Armstrong's family went to church every Sunday morning. Since he was not allowed to work or play on the Sabbath, Armstrong spent every Sunday afternoon writing in a small tablet. He recorded all the places he had been and people he had seen during the previous week.

Armstrong also enjoyed reading, but books were very scarce during his youth. "All that could be called a library in our school was a short shelf in each room, a place for not more than a dozen books," he recalled. "Visiting elementary schools today brings a lump to my throat. . . . I tell my audiences, usually sixth and seventh graders, that if I had by some magic been transported to such a library when I was their age, I wouldn't have gone home when school was out. I would have been reading until the last door was locked against me."

As a boy, Armstrong's main reading material was limited to catalogs and the Bible. But he later realized that this situation helped him develop his imagination. "No one told me that the Bible was not for young readers, so I found some exciting stories in it," he noted. "Not until years later did I understand why I liked the Bible stories so much. It was because everything that could possibly be omitted was omitted. There was no description of David so I could be like David."

Another thing that helped fire young Armstrong's imagination was the deep sense of history surrounding his childhood home. Collierstown is lo-

cated in Virginia's Shenandoah Valley, which was the scene of many important events during the Civil War. Armstrong attended the church where the Confederate military leader Thomas "Stonewall" Jackson once taught Sunday school. In fact, his grandfather had ridden with Jackson's army.

During the time when Armstrong was growing up, people in Virginia and other parts of the South practiced segregation. Under segregation, black people were kept apart from white people and forced to use separate schools, restaurants, theaters, restrooms, drinking fountains, and other facilities that were inferior to those available for whites. In many ways, segregation policies discriminated against blacks and kept them in an inferior position in society.

Unlike many other white children in the South at this time, Armstrong had the opportunity to get to know a black man. This man, Charles Jones, taught at a rural school for black children. On weekends and during the summer, he helped Armstrong's father on their farm. Jones often had dinner with the Armstrong family and told the children stories. Most of his tales were folk stories and Bible stories. But he once told a more personal story about a loyal coon dog with a remarkable bark. Armstrong always remembered that story and wondered about the man who had told it.

EDUCATION

Even though Armstrong was a good student, he dreaded going to school as a boy. He had trouble fitting in with the other kids at the local elementary and junior high schools in Collierstown. Armstrong was small for his age, wore thick glasses, tended to stutter when he spoke, and often had trouble breathing due to asthma. "My loud breathing was a cause for laughter in the classroom," he remembered. "Many a morning I would try to convince my mother that I was too choked up for school. But she never gave in, and out the door and down the road I would go, crying half of the mile I had to walk."

> ***"No one told me that the Bible was not for young readers, so I found some exciting stories in it," he noted. "Not until years later did I understand why I liked the Bible stories so much. It was because everything that could possibly be omitted was omitted. There was no description of David so I could be like David."***

But Armstrong's attitude toward school began to change during the sixth grade, when one of his teachers singled him out for having the neatest paper in the class. From that time on, he approached school with greater confidence and worked hard to excel. "Now, suddenly, I knew where I could win. I could have the most nearly perfect written work—whether spelling, multiplication table, or sentence," he noted. "That day began a Depression-born country boy's determined journey toward 'the gates of excellence.'"

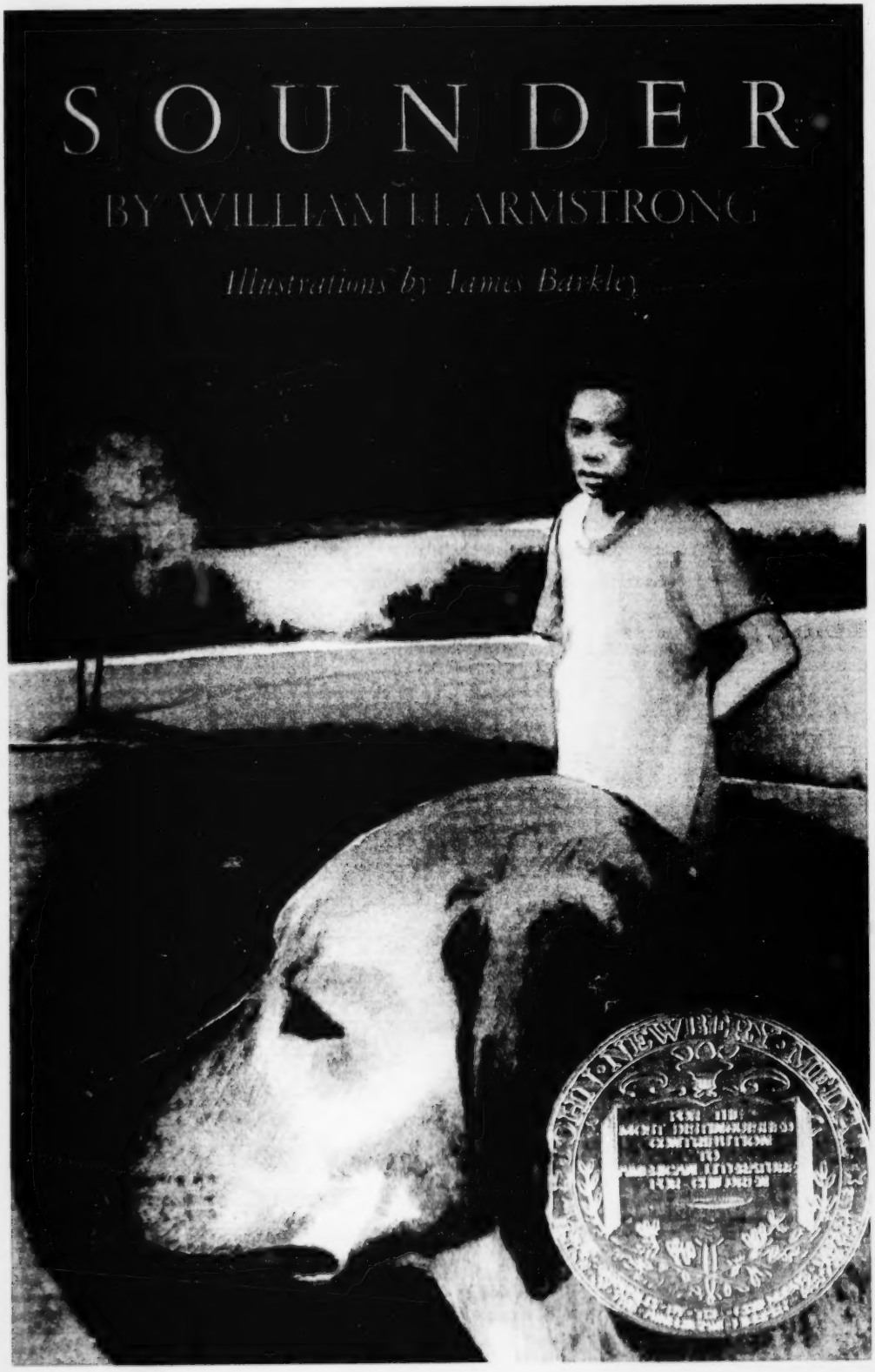
Armstrong spent his high school years at the Augusta Military Academy in Virginia. For an English assignment, he wrote a story about a child in a wheelchair who watches the world go by outside his window. The boy especially likes watching a pair of birds building a nest and caring for their young in a nearby tree. One day, the boy's cat finds the nest and kills the baby birds while he watches helplessly. The story was so moving—and so different from those written by the other students—that Armstrong's teachers did not believe he had written it. They accused him of copying it from a book.

But Armstrong also enjoyed the support of good teachers at Augusta. When he had trouble understanding geometry, for example, his math teacher used an innovative approach to help him. The teacher asked him to research and write about the origins of geometry in ancient Greece. Armstrong soon became fascinated by the subject. Once he made the connection between the geometry problems in class and the history of geometry, he performed well in the subject.

After graduating from Augusta in 1932, Armstrong went on to attend Hampden-Sydney College in Virginia. He concentrated on history and English during his college years. He wrote for the school newspaper, edited the school's literary magazine, and earned several awards for his writing. Armstrong graduated with honors with a bachelor's degree in history in 1936. Afterward, he completed a year of graduate study at the University of Virginia in Charlottesville.

CAREER HIGHLIGHTS

William H. Armstrong wrote more than 15 books during his career, including several novels for young adults, two biographies of notable Americans, and a series of study guides. But he is best known for his novel *Sounder*. Despite the success of the novel, however, Armstrong always considered teaching to be his main career.



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Choosing a Career in Teaching

Once he finished his education, Armstrong had to decide whether to get a job as a journalist or as a teacher. He eventually decided to become a teacher, and he ended up teaching history for the next 40 years. Armstrong started his teaching career at the Virginia Episcopal School in Lynchburg in 1939. During this time, he married Martha Stone Street Williams and started a family, which eventually grew to include three children. In 1945, Armstrong and his family moved to Kent, Connecticut. He taught ninth-grade history and English at the Kent School until his retirement.

Armstrong always considered himself primarily a teacher, even after the success of *Sounder*. "Teaching is more than the subject and textbook; it's hopefully directing some young wanderer in a direction that will add quality, and, in rare cases, love of learning, to a life," he stated. One of the ways Armstrong got his students to work hard was to excuse the top students from taking his final exam. The school frowned upon this practice, but Armstrong did it anyway. He felt that it was an important way of rewarding students for their efforts. "The result, of course, is that more people dream of that point of excellence and some achieve it," he explained.

Becoming a Writer

During the first several years of his teaching career, Armstrong never gave much thought to writing. But in 1950, the headmaster of his school asked him to prepare a study guide for students. This book, called *Study Is Hard Work*, ended up being the first in a series of books that presented Armstrong's principles of learning. Some of his later study guides included *Tools of Thinking, Study Tips,* and *87 Ways to Help Your Child in School.*

In 1953, Armstrong used his carpentry skills to build a house in Kent. It was located on a hillside overlooking the Housatonic River. Sadly, his wife died suddenly just a few months after they moved in. Armstrong then had to care for their three young children—ages 8, 6, and 4—alone. "You know, when you have tangles to comb out of your daughter's hair and vitamins rolling off the table you stop thinking," he said of that time.

Considering his teaching and family responsibilities, Armstrong could only find time to write very early in the morning. "It's amazing what getting up early does for your day," he noted. "When other people are starting, you're way ahead of them because you've done half a day's work. It gives you a good feeling." In 1957, Armstrong published a nonfiction book for adults, *Through Troubled Waters,* about the experience of losing his wife and struggling to care for his young family.

Sounder

One fall evening, as he walked along a country road in the moonlight, Armstrong heard an unusual sound. It reminded him of the story he had heard as a boy about the coon dog with the amazing bark. Over the next few months, he kept thinking about the story and about Charles Jones, the black teacher who had told it. He began to wonder what Jones's childhood had been like, and how he had managed to educate himself in the rural South. Since Armstrong knew very few details of the man's life, he had to fill in the blanks with his imagination and his knowledge of history. Before long, a novel started to take shape in his head. "I would create his boyhood with that desire to learn, supported by love and self-respect, which produced the remarkable man," Armstrong said.

Armstrong described Sounder's distinctive bark like this. "It was not an ordinary bark. It filled up the night and made music as though the branches of all the trees were being pulled across silver strings. A stranger hearing Sounder's treed bark suddenly fill the night might have thought there were six dogs at the foot of one tree. But all over the countryside, neighbors, leaning against slanting porch posts or standing in open cabin doorways and listening, knew that it was Sounder."

The novel eventually became Armstrong's best-known work, *Sounder*. The book tells the story of a black family struggling against poverty and discrimination in the rural South. Published in 1969, *Sounder* is the story of a family of poor black sharecroppers (people who work someone else's land in exchange for a portion of the crops they grow) who own a dog named Sounder. The dog is not only a beloved family pet, but also helps the father hunt raccoons. When he traps a coon in a tree, Sounder lets loose his distinctive bark. "It was not an ordinary bark. It filled up the night and made music as though the branches of all the trees were being pulled across silver strings," Armstrong wrote in the novel. "A stranger hearing Sounder's treed bark suddenly fill the night might have thought there were six dogs at the foot of one tree. But all over the countryside, neighbors, leaning against slanting porch posts or standing in open cabin doorways and listening, knew that it was Sounder."

Actress Cicely Tyson with an unidentified boy in the 1972 movie version of Sounder.

One winter, the father is not able to sell enough coonskins to provide for the family. He ends up stealing a ham from a neighboring farm in order to feed the children. But the sheriff soon arrives to arrest him. Sounder is shot when he tries to protect his master, and he drags himself into the

woods. In the meantime, the father is taken away in chains and sentenced to perform hard labor in prison. The story then focuses on the oldest son, who must help his mother run the farm while he grieves over the loss of his father and dog. The son learns many important lessons about hardship and sacrifice. Eventually, he meets an elderly black schoolteacher who takes him in and teaches him to read. He finally overcomes the poverty and injustice of his childhood through education.

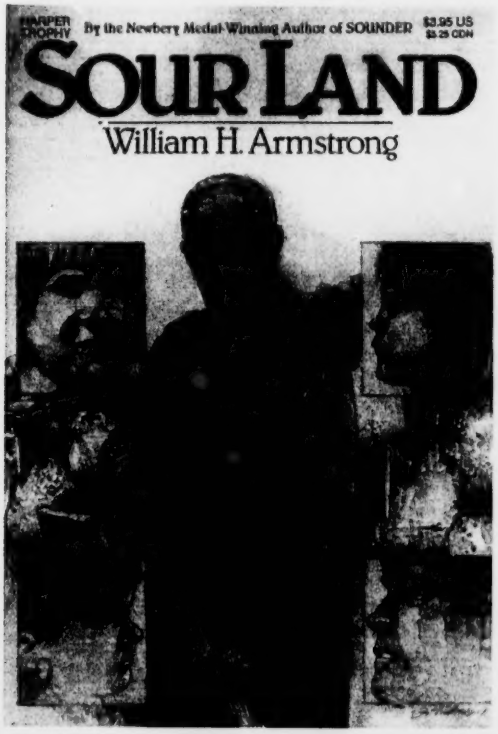
Sounder Meets with Praise and Controversy

One of the unique things about *Sounder* that has received both praise and criticism is that Armstrong does not give much specific information about his main characters or where they live. In fact, he does not even give the members of the family names, except for Sounder. Armstrong claimed that he did this on purpose so that readers would be able to relate the story to their own lives. He wanted people to identify with the characters, the way he had identified with the characters in the Bible stories he read as a boy. "With names they would represent one family," he explained. "Without names they become universal—representing all people who suffer privation and injustice, but through love, self-respect, devotion, and desire for improvement, make it in the world."

Armstrong explained why he did not give names to his characters. "With names they would represent one family. Without names they become universal—representing all people who suffer privation and injustice, but through love, self-respect, devotion, and desire for improvement, make it in the world."

But some reviewers criticized Armstrong's decision not to name the characters in *Sounder*. They claimed that the lack of names prevented the characters from developing as individuals, and instead turned them into racial stereotypes. Other critics did not like the fact that the characters accepted their situation without fighting back. They claimed that this made them poor role models for black readers. Finally, some critics said that Armstrong failed to create an authentic picture of rural black life in the novel.

Overall, though, *Sounder* received a positive response from readers and reviewers. Many critics praised Armstrong's descriptive writing style, saying that it made the story come alive and helped readers understand the



prejudice and poverty faced by blacks in the South. "There is an epic quality in the deeply moving, long-ago story of cruelty, loneliness, and silent suffering," Ethel L. Heins wrote in a review for *Horn Book*. "The power of the writing lies in its combination of subtlety and strength."

In 1970, *Sounder* was honored with the Newbery Medal—the most prestigious award in children's literature. The Newbery Medal honors the best work of children's literature each year. Two years later, the novel was turned into a movie starring Cicely Tyson and Paul Winfield. The movie changed a few aspects of the story. For example, it gave more information about the characters and it had a happier ending. But the movie version of *Sounder* was just as successful as the book. It ended up being nominated for four Academy Awards, including best actor, best actress, best adapted screenplay, and best picture.

Later Books

In 1971, Armstrong published a sequel to *Sounder* called *Sour Land*. This book features the son from the first novel, but it takes place many years later, when he is an old man. The man—who now has a name, Moses Waters—returns to the Southern farming community where he was raised in order to teach at a local school. On weekends and during the summer, Waters helps out a white man whose wife has died. Waters tutors the man's children and tells them stories. But some people in the community still hold racist attitudes, and they object to Waters spending so much time at a white man's house. The situation becomes violent when the old man speaks out against the murder of a black girl. *Sour Land* received mixed reviews from critics. Some reviewers praised Armstrong's beautiful descriptions of the land and the changing seasons. But others claimed that his characters were not believable.

Armstrong published several other books for children and young adults over the years. Most of his stories center around family life and racial con-

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flicts in the rural South. For example, *The MacLeod Place,* published in 1972, examines the relationship between a boy and his grandfather as a proposed highway threatens their Virginia farm. *The Tale of Tawny and Dingo,* published in 1979, is a picture book about the friendship between a sheepdog and a lamb. Armstrong's works also include biographies of the artist Grandma Moses and of President Abraham Lincoln. But none of these books ever approached the level of popular and critical success that the author reached with *Sounder.*

Armstrong always wrote his stories longhand on a lined tablet, just as he had done as a boy on Sunday afternoons. He worried that using a typewriter or word processor would put too much distance between him and his ideas. "Most of my books begin with an idea that I take inside and keep there for a long time before I write a single word," he explained. "It gets into my blood and is filtered through my heart until it is a part of me." Armstrong died at his Connecticut home on April 11, 1999, at the age of 87.

"Most of my books begin with an idea that I take inside and keep there for a long time before I write a single word. It gets into my blood and is filtered through my heart until it is a part of me."

MARRIAGE AND FAMILY

William H. Armstrong married Martha Stone Street Williams in 1943, shortly after he finished college. They had three children together—Christopher, David, and Mary. After his wife died in 1953, Armstrong raised his children alone. His daughter and his son David both became accomplished artists. David even illustrated two of his father's books.

Until the time of his death, Armstrong lived near Kent, Connecticut, on 20 acres of land near the Housatonic River. He built the house himself in the 1950s. It featured pine logs, stone fireplaces, and lots of windows.

HOBBIES AND OTHER INTERESTS

Armstrong raised sheep at his home in Connecticut and sold their wool to local mills. He also enjoyed farming, stone masonry, and carpentry. "I'm a loner," he once said. "The pleasures I enjoy most in life are my flock of sheep, my three children, my land, . . . my house and stone walls that I built myself, and my flowers and garden."

SELECTED WRITINGS

Fiction for Young Adults

Sounder, 1969
Sour Land, 1971
The MacLeod Place, 1972
The Mills of God, 1972
Hadassah: Esther the Orphan Queen, 1972
My Animals, 1973
JoAnna's Miracle, 1978
The Tale of Tawny and Dingo, 1979

Nonfiction for Young Adults

Tools of Thinking: A Self-Help Workbook for Students in Grades 5-9, 1968
Barefoot in the Grass: The Story of Grandma Moses, 1970
The Education of Abraham Lincoln, 1974

Nonfiction for Adults

Study Is Hard Work, 1956
Through Troubled Waters, 1957
Peoples of the Ancient World, 1959 (with Joseph W. Swain)
87 Ways to Help Your Child in School, 1961
Word Power in Five Easy Lessons, 1969
Study Tapes, 1975
Study Tips: How to Improve Your Study Habits and Improve Your Grades, 1976

HONORS AND AWARDS

School Bell Award (National Association of School Administrators): 1963
Newbery Medal (American Library Association): 1970, for *Sounder*
Lewis Carroll Shelf Award: 1970, for *Sounder*
Mark Twain Award (Missouri Association of School Librarians): 1972, for *Sounder*
Nene Award (Hawaii Association of School Librarians): 1972, for *Sounder*
Jewish-Christian Brotherhood Award: 1972

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Contemporary Authors New Revision Series, Vol. 9, 1983

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Patricia Reilly Giff 1935-

American Writer of Books for Children and Middle-Grade Readers
Author of the "Kids of the Polk Street School" Series and the 1998 Newbery Honor Book *Lily's Crossing*

BIRTH

Patricia Reilly Giff was born Patricia Reilly on April 26, 1935, in the St. Albans section of Queens in New York City. Her father, William J. Reilly, was an inspector for the New York City Police Department, while her mother, Alice Tiernan (Moeller) Reilly, was a homemaker. Patricia had a younger sister, Anne.

YOUTH

Growing up, Giff's favorite pastime was reading. "I spent most of my childhood with a book in my hands," she recalled. "I read in bed before the sun was up, then hunched over the breakfast table with my book in my lap. After school, I'd sit in the kitchen, leaning against the warm radiator, dreaming over a story."

By the time she reached her early teens, Giff had read everything in the juvenile section of the small local public library. Miss Bailey, the librarian, had to sneak over to the adult section to find more books for her to read. Although Giff always wanted to write stories like the ones she loved to read, she did not believe she could do it. "The people who wrote were dead . . . or important, far away and inaccessible," she noted. "And who was I to dream about writing something like *Little Women* or *The Secret Garden* or *Jane Eyre*?"

Every summer during her childhood, Giff and her family spent time at a cabin in Rockaway, a seaside community on Long Island, New York. Giff loved the water, and spent lots of time swimming or boating. She later included memories of these summers at the beach in one of her most critically acclaimed books, *Lily's Crossing*.

"I spent most of my childhood with a book in my hands. I read in bed before the sun was up, then hunched over the breakfast table with my book in my lap. After school, I'd sit in the kitchen, leaning against the warm radiator, dreaming over a story."

EDUCATION

During her years in the local public schools, Giff's love of reading sometimes interfered with her school work. She often had trouble putting down the book she was reading for pleasure in order to do her homework.

Giff remembered an incident from elementary school that later affected her approach to writing books for children. One time, she was so afraid of a teacher that she refused to go to school. In order to boost her confidence, her mother said, "Remember, you're Patricia Reilly." She repeated her own name over and over all day at school, "holding on to my sense of self," she noted. "It made me realize that I was special—a unique person." In her writing, Giff often tries to convey that all children are special in some way.

After graduating from high school, Giff attended Marymount College in New York City. She started out majoring in English, but soon became overwhelmed by the genius of some of the authors she studied and changed her major to business. She earned a bachelor's degree from Marymount in 1956. Giff went on to study history at St. John's University in Jamaica, New York, earning a master's degree in 1958. In 1975, while she was working as a teacher and reading consultant, she took courses at Hofstra University for a professional diploma in reading.

CAREER HIGHLIGHTS

Becoming a Teacher of Reading

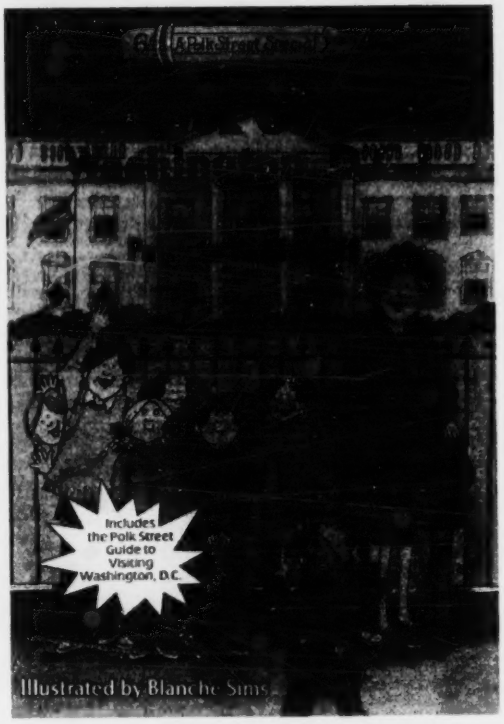
After graduating from college, Giff was not sure what career she wanted to pursue. She ended up becoming a teacher on the recommendation of her college dean. As it turned out, she loved teaching and continued in this career for 20 years. Giff started out teaching in New York City. In 1959, she married a police detective named James Giff. She took a few years off from teaching to have three children, James, William, and Alice. But she resumed her career in 1964, teaching third through sixth grades in Elmont, New York.

As a teacher, Giff said, "I had tough kids—kids who would be in trouble with the police, kids who went to jail eventually, one who died of an alcohol overdose, two who committed murder."

Giff specialized in teaching students who had trouble reading. She was gratified when she was able to help kids learn to read and go on to become successful students. But she was not able to help every kid who entered her classroom. In fact, a few of her students developed even worse problems over time. "I had tough kids—kids who would be in trouble with the police, kids who went to jail eventually, one who died of an alcohol overdose, two who committed murder," she confided. In 1971, Giff became a reading consultant and helped develop curriculum for the Elmont Schools.

Throughout her teaching career, Giff still felt the desire to write books of her own. She especially wanted to create funny, interesting stories that would help her students learn to read. "By this time I had worked with so many children who had terrible problems that I wanted to say things that would make them laugh," she stated. "I wanted to tell them that they were

special. That we all are." But it always seemed that she was too busy teaching and raising her family to begin writing.



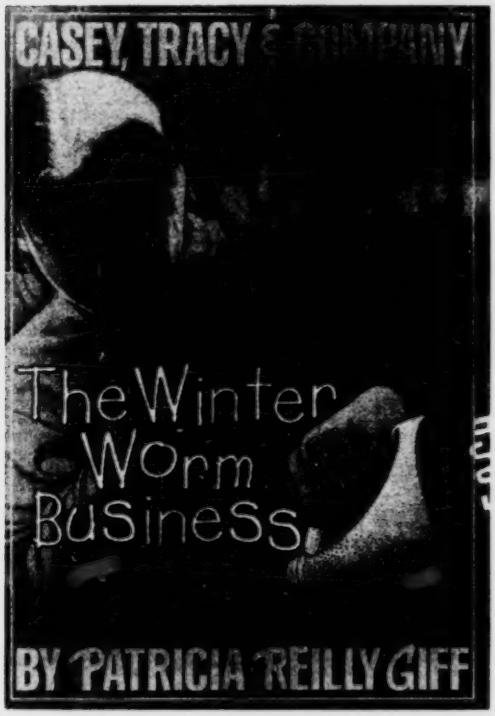
In 1975—the year she turned 40—Giff decided that she needed to make time for writing if she ever hoped to publish a book. She set a goal of writing each day for an entire year. The only time she could fit writing into her schedule was first thing in the morning. She dragged herself out of bed and spent an hour at her typewriter every day before school. Her husband was very supportive of her efforts. In fact, he combined two adjacent closets off their kitchen to create a writing area for her.

At first, Giff found the process of putting words on paper to be extremely difficult. "It was hard. It was really so hard. But then I began to feel the joy of it, learning as I wrote," she recalled. "And then, suddenly, writing became one of the most important parts of my life, a part that now I couldn't do without. I write about my childhood, the things that have given worry, or joy and laughter, and sometimes I write about the things that have happened to my own children."

Publishing Her First Children's Book

By the time that first year ended, Giff enjoyed writing. She continued to write every day for the next few years. In 1978, she submitted one of her stories to several children's book publishers, and one of them accepted it. Her first book, a picture book called *Today Was a Terrible Day*, appeared in 1979.

Within a few years, Giff had become so successful as a writer that she decided to quit her teaching job and write full-time. "I loved teaching. It was my world," she explained. "I only left because I was overwhelmed with three careers—teaching, writing, and my family." Her husband retired from his job with the police force at the same time, and they moved from Elmont to a rural area near Weston, Connecticut.



Since then, Giff has published more than 80 books for children, including picture books, early chapter books, and middle-grade novels. Most of her books are humorous and deal with situations that are familiar to her young audience. "In dozens of light and spunky novels, she has helped early readers connect with the angst of getting glasses or losing status to the new kid on the block or telling whoppers so kids won't laugh at you," reviewer Cecelia Goodnow wrote in the *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*. In all her books, Giff chooses words carefully to appeal to kids with reading difficulties.

Giff has drawn the ideas for many of her books—including her popular series "Kids of the Polk Street School"—from her experiences as a teacher. Still other ideas have come from her own childhood or the lives of her children. For example, she got the idea for *The Winter Worm Business*, published in 1981, on a snowy winter day. As she worked in the kitchen, she overheard one of her sons' friends complaining about his jerk of a cousin coming to visit over Christmas vacation. This got Giff thinking about an unpleasant girl who often stayed with her family when she was a child.

Giff sat down and wrote a story about a boy named Leroy who is forced to entertain his miserable cousin Mitchell Everhart. Leroy's attempts to get back at Mitchell lead to a series of comic adventures. By the time she finished the book, however, Giff had begun to feel some sympathy for Mitchell. "I found myself looking for my theme and finally found it in poor old loud-mouthed Mitchell. I don't know if I like him much better than when I started the book, but at least I'm beginning to understand him," she noted. "Everyone, including the Mitchell Everharts, has his or her own specialness."

"Kids of the Polk Street School" Series

Around the time that she became a full-time writer, Giff began publishing the "Kids of the Polk Street School" series of early chapter books. It sold an impressive 1.5 million copies in the first year and continues to be one

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of her most popular series. The Polk Street books center around the children in Ms. Rooney's class, including Richard Best (known as Beast) and Emily Arrow. Giff based the character of Emily, who often wears a pink party dress with dirty red sneakers, on her daughter, Alice. "My characters are often based on people I know—children I worked with, teachers, friends," she revealed. "Ms. Rooney is probably the teacher I was, and Mrs. Paris the teacher I wanted to be—understanding, wonderful with children, wise, and perfect."

The Polk Street stories put an amusing twist on common school experiences, like class plays, field trips, and disagreements among students. Although younger children enjoy reading about these familiar situations, older children with reading problems also like Giff's books. "The Polk Street series became double-edged," she noted. "Teachers would use it with older kids as humor, to teach remedial reading, whereas the younger ones would read about these little kids and were very serious about it. You know, it's their lives."

> ***"It's more fun to try to make a character three-dimensional by giving her flaws," Giff explained about Lily's tendency to lie. "To have her telling fibs to try to make herself more important—that's the kind of thing that a kid who's lost her mother might do."***

Giff has said that *Sunny-Side Up,* a book from the Polk Street series published in 1986, is one of her favorites among all her books. It tells the story of a young boy whose family is moving away from the only neighborhood he has known. He decides that he is not going with his family, and instead plans to hide out in his best friend's garage. The boy and his friend make lots of preparations, including planting a garden to provide him with food. But finally a classmate with more common sense comes along and points out that the boy will be cold and lonely there without his family. *Sunny-Side Up* has special meaning for Giff because she wrote it as she was preparing to move from Elmont to Weston. She was excited about her new home, but she also felt sad to leave her old one because she had raised her children there.

Giff has continued to create new titles in the Polk Street series for the past 15 years. But in 1988, she also started a new series for younger readers called "New Kids of the Polk Street School." This series features the younger siblings of the main characters from the first series, including

Emily Arrow's younger sister Stacy. It's proven to be as popular with Giff's young fans as the original series.

Other Popular Series

Another one of Giff's popular series of early chapter books centers around Ronald Morgan, a likeable second-grader who runs into all sorts of common problems and dilemmas. Giff got the idea for the character of Ronald from a student she met during her teaching career. One day, while she was on cafeteria duty, she had trouble opening a window. An unusual boy named Ronald came up and helped her. He explained that he wore his yellow raincoat all the time because it was new. When he sat down to eat, he slopped his lunch all over the place. Later, when Ronald became one of Giff's reading students, he had all sorts of problems getting to class. One time, Giff found him hiding in a phone booth. She recalled that she knew right away Ronald "was a kid to write a book about."

In *The Almost Awful Play,* published in 1983, Ronald tells about how he saved his class play from being awful. At first, Ronald is disappointed to be cast as a cat in the play. He would rather play the role of the prince, or even work backstage as the curtain-puller. To make matters worse, his classmate Rosemary, who is cast as the princess, becomes very bossy and makes fun of everyone. But during the play, Ronald saves the day by helping the prince with his lines, and then making up a delightful surprise ending. In *The Almost Awful Play,* according to critics, Giff showcased the qualities for which she is widely praised: her simple writing style, sense of humor, and respect for a child's concerns. "Giff doesn't make judgments; she tells it as it is," Wendy Cheyette Lewison wrote in the *New York Times.* "Her ability to give us memorable characters, so evident in her books for older children, is evident in this book too. Ronald Morgan will be remembered—and loved."

Giff has produced several other popular series of early chapter books over the years. For example, her "Polka Dot Private Eye" series was inspired by

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her husband and father's stories about their police work. It features Dawn Tiffanie Bosco, who also appeared in the Polk Street School books. When her grandmother gives her a polka-dot box full of investigative tools, Dawn becomes an amateur detective and solves mysteries.

Giff used herself as the model for the main character in her "Casey, Tracy and Company" series. Casey Valentine describes herself as a girl with "no zip," like a "lump of vanilla pudding." But she soon proves to have an active imagination and great storytelling abilities. Casey's best friend, Walter, asks her to take over the duty of writing letters to his pen pal, Tracy. Casey entertains Tracy with all sorts of fantastic stories about her life, and the two become friends. One of Giff's recent series, called "Friends and Amigos," centers around Sarah, who learns to speak Spanish from her friend Anna Ortiz during their adventures together. In this series, Giff gives her readers a Spanish lesson in every book. What these and her other series share in common are their memorable characters, in humorous situations that kids recognize from their own lives. The characters face problems, but none too complicated for a kid to resolve. Giff's series books are fast-paced, entertaining, funny, and just plain fun to read.

Lily's Crossing

Although Giff's series of books were very popular with young readers, she had not received many awards during her career as a writer. This situation changed in 1998, when Giff received several prestigious awards for her historical novel *Lily's Crossing*.

This book for middle-grade readers—which took nearly four years to write—is more serious than Giff's earlier books. *Lily's Crossing* tells the story of a 10-year-old American girl, Lily Mollahan, whose life is thrown into confusion by World War II, which took place from 1939 to 1945. Giff drew many of Lily's experiences from her own childhood. "I was nine in 1944. I remember that summer so clearly," Giff recalled. "My 28-year-old neighbor had lost her husband at Christmastime. The whole country was involved in this war. I was afraid in this war. I lived in New York, and we had searchlights overhead." Giff remembered listening to war reports on the radio, watching troops go out to sea, and collecting scrap metal to help the government make weapons and ammunition.

In the book, Lily lives in New York City and spends her summers in the seaside community of Rockaway on Long Island. Shortly after she arrives in the summer of 1944, however, she learns that her best friend is moving to Detroit, so her father can work in a factory making equipment for the war effort. Then Lily's own father—to whom she has grown very close since her mother died—joins the Army Corps of Engineers and is sent to

Europe. Suddenly Lily faces a lonely summer living with her strict grandmother, worrying about her father, and dealing with widespread shortages of butter, sugar, gasoline, and other important goods.

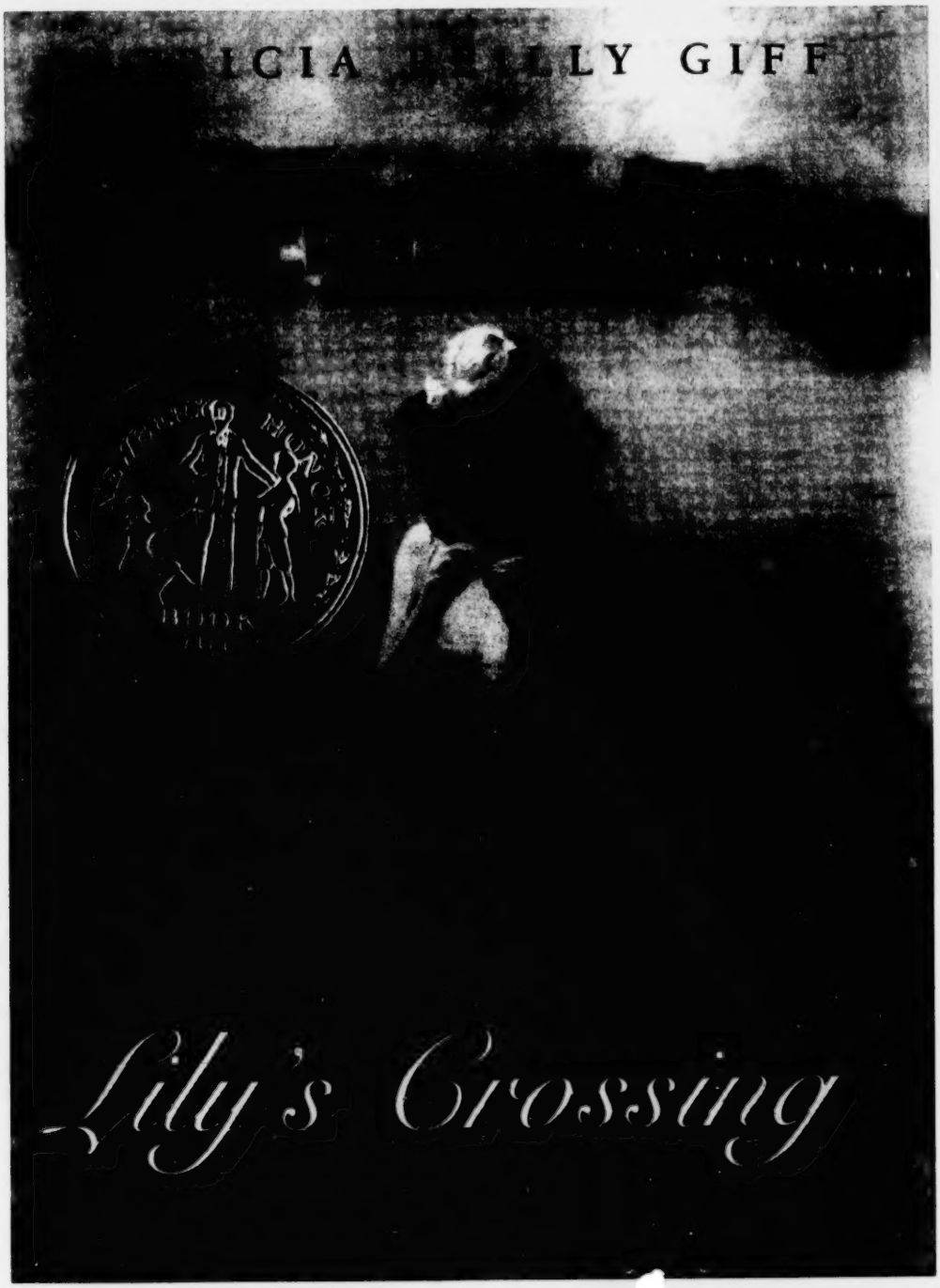
One day, Lily meets a boy named Albert who has come to the United States as a war refugee from Hungary. Several members of Albert's family were killed when the German army invaded his country, so he has experienced the hardships of war firsthand. Lily and Albert become friends when they work together to rescue a kitten that is being washed out to sea. But Lily threatens their friendship, and even Albert's life, by telling lies. "It's more fun to try to make a character three-dimensional by giving her flaws," Giff explained about Lily's tendency to lie. "To have her telling fibs to try to make herself more important—that's the kind of thing that a kid who's lost her mother might do." Eventually, Lily's friendship with Albert helps her to appreciate her grandmother and learn the value of the truth.

Giff had this to say about winning the Newbery Honor Award. "It is an affirmation. Somebody is telling you that you can write. I've written about 80 books, but there is always that fragile feeling about your writing—whether you are able to do it well. If you have a Newbery Honor, you have been recognized by the most important group—the librarians."

Lily's Crossing received a very positive response upon its publication in 1997. As a critic for the *New York Times Book Review* wrote, "With Ms. Giff's usual, easygoing language and swift, short paragraphs, the impact of the war on an American child is brilliantly told." For Giff, the best response came from the American Library Association, which chose *Lily's Crossing* as a runner-up for the Newbery Medal—the highest award in children's literature. "It is an affirmation. Somebody is telling you that you can write," she explained. "I've written about 80 books, but there is always that fragile feeling about your writing—whether you are able to do it well. If you have a Newbery Honor, you have been recognized by the most important group—the librarians."

Future Plans

Winning the Newbery Honor has encouraged Giff to continue writing more serious books for middle-grade readers. For her next project, she



plans to write a novel about the Irish potato famine of 1845-49. During the 1800s, poor farmers in Ireland supported their families by growing potatoes and other crops. Without land of their own for farming, many farmers had to pay wealthy English landowners a percentage of their crops in exchange for use of their land.

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In 1845, a disease wiped out the potato crops, putting many families in danger of starving. But some landowners still demanded payment in other food crops. Nearly one million Irish people starved or died of disease during this time, while over a million others decided to leave their homes and make a new life in America. Giff's grandmother was one of these early Irish immigrants. "I really want to write about what happened to our people," she stated. "This will be middle-grade fiction, but using some of the stories that I know from my family and some of the stories people have told me in Ireland."

"I'm a writer. I want the children to bubble up with laughter, or to cry over my books. I want to picture them under a cherry tree, or at the library with my book in their hands. But more, I want to see them reading in the classroom. I want to see children in solitude at their desks, reading, absorbing, lost in a book."

Encouraging Children to Read

Giff began her career as a writer in order to provide suitable books for her reading students. Yet she says that she writes to entertain rather than teach her young readers. "If by some miracle the teaching occurs, or the children pick up on something that is meaningful to them, then it's a bonus," she noted. Still, her greatest pleasure is encouraging young people to read. "I'm a writer. I want the children to bubble up with laughter, or to cry over my books. I want to picture them under a cherry tree, or at the library with my book in their hands," she explained. "But more, I want to see them reading in the classroom. I want to see children in solitude at their desks, reading, absorbing, lost in a book."

Advice to Young Writers

"My advice for writers is to write! Write every day! I don't think I have missed more than five days, in the last 15 years, of writing. I write every day, a little piece of time; it is my time, it belongs to me, I guard it jealously, and that's what I tell the kids. Write and don't show your writing to someone who isn't entirely sympathetic. I always show my writing first to my husband because I know he's going to like it, no matter what, no matter how bad it is, so I feel better, I feel happy about my writing then. Otherwise, if you show it to someone who is critical in the beginning,

their criticism hurts your writing. It makes you fragile, it makes you afraid so that you may not finish."

MAJOR INFLUENCES

Giff had this to say about those who have had the greatest influence on her writing. "My husband is such an influence. My husband was the one who believed that I could write in the first place. I always say that if I wrote the dictionary, he'd say, 'What a wonderful plot.' He laughs at the right places. I can see tears in his eyes when I want them to be there. He and my fourth-grade teacher, who made me fall in love with writing; my mother, who gave me books all the time; and my father, who read to me, are my influences."

MARRIAGE AND FAMILY

Patricia Reilly married James A. Giff, who worked as a detective for the New York City Police Department, on January 31, 1959. They have three grown children—James, William, and Alice—and six grandchildren. Giff and her husband live in a rural, wooded area near Weston, Connecticut, with their three cats. The road to their house winds through the country, passing several streams and ponds, as well as the stone walls from old farms. Giff enjoys sitting in the gazebo in their yard and watching wildlife pass by. They also have an apartment in New York City and a summer cottage on the Delaware River near Hancock, New York.

HOBBIES AND OTHER INTERESTS

When she is not writing, Giff still loves to read, especially in the bathtub or on the beach. She also travels around the country to visit schools and talk with children about reading and writing. She explains that her visits to schools "make children realize that real people write books and that they can write books." She also encourages parents to read to very young children because listening helps them develop language skills. "I became convinced that a prerequisite is listening to stories read aloud, that this listening establishes the fierce desire to read," she noted. "Children must listen to hear the rhythm, to feel the measure, to learn the music of the language."

In 1990, Giff and her family started something new—they opened a children's bookstore in Fairfield, Connecticut. They named it The Dinosaur's Paw after one of her novels. They got the idea for the bookstore when her oldest son, James, decided to make a career change. "He hated what he was doing, so we got to talking about what he'd like to do instead," Giff re-

called. "And since, in our family, we are all book people, we thought about opening a children's bookstore." Although James runs the bookstore, the whole family is involved in some way. Giff herself teaches writing workshops for both children and adults. She has also convinced many of her author friends to visit the store and sign copies of their books. "We want to make The Dinosaur's Paw a community that brings children and books together," she explained. "We want to share our love of children's books and writing, and to help others explore the whole world of children's books."

SELECTED WRITINGS

Series Books

"Casey, Tracy and Company" Series, 1979-
"Ronald Morgan" Series, 1980-
"Abby Jones, Junior Detective" Series, 1981-
"Kids of the Polk Street School" Series, 1984-
"Polka-Dot Private Eye" Series, 1987-
"New Kids at the Polk Street School" Series, 1988-
"Lincoln Lions Band" Series, 1992-
"Friends and Amigos" Series, 1995-
"Ballet Slippers" Series, 1996-

Other

Left-Handed Shortstop, 1980
Next Year I'll Be Special, 1980 (picture book)
The Gift of the Pirate Queen, 1982
Suspect, 1982
Kidnap in San Juan, 1983
Rat Teeth, 1984
Mother Teresa: Sister to the Poor, 1986 (biography)
Laura Ingalls Wilder: Growing Up in the Little House, 1987 (biography)
I Love Saturday, 1989
Poopsie Pomerantz, Pick Up Your Feet, 1989
Matthew Jackson Meets the Wall, 1990
Diana: Twentieth-Century Princess, 1991 (biography)
Monster Rabbit Runs, 1991
The War Began at Supper: Letters to Miss Loria, 1991
Advent: Molly Maguire, 1992
Shark in School, 1994
Lily's Crossing, 1997

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McElmeel, Sharron L. *100 Most Popular Children's Authors: Biographical Sketches and Bibliographies,* 1999
Something about the Author, Vol. 33, 1983; Vol. 70, 1993

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New York Times, Sep. 20, 1998, sec.14, p.3
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Teaching K-8, Apr. 1987, p.35

ADDRESS

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New York, NY 10036

WORLD WIDE WEB SITES

http://www.randomhouse.com/teachersbdd/giff.html
http://www.edupaperback.org/authorbios/giffpatr.html

RETROSPECTIVE

Langston Hughes 1902-1967

American Poet, Playwright, Novelist, and Essayist
Leading Figure in the Harlem Renaissance

BIRTH

James Mercer Langston Hughes, known from boyhood as Langston, was born on February 1, 1902, in Joplin, Missouri. His father, James Nathaniel Hughes, was an attorney and businessman. His mother, Carrie Mercer (Langston) Hughes, had attended college and was a talented amateur actress and poet. His parents separated when he was very young. Lang-

ston was an only child until he reached his teen years and his mother remarried. At that point, he gained a stepfather, Homer Clark, and a half-brother, Kit.

YOUTH

When Langston was just a baby, his father left the family and moved to Mexico. In the United States in the early 20th century, African-Americans faced discrimination because of their race. As a black man, James Hughes felt that he could find greater acceptance and business opportunities in Mexico. When Langston was about five, he and his mother joined his father, but their visit to Mexico ended abruptly. "No sooner had my mother, my grandmother, and I got to Mexico City than there was a big earthquake," he recalled. "People ran out from their houses into the Alameda, and the big National Opera House they were building sank down into the ground, and tarantulas came out of the walls—and my mother said she wanted to go back home at once to Kansas, where people spoke English or something she could understand and there were no earthquakes."

"No sooner had my mother, my grandmother, and I got to Mexico City than there was a big earthquake. People ran out from their houses into the Alameda, and the big National Opera House they were building sank down into the ground, and tarantulas came out of the walls—and my mother said she wanted to go back home at once to Kansas, where people spoke English or something she could understand and there were no earthquakes."

Langston and his mother returned to the United States, while his father remained in Mexico. Faced with raising a child alone, Carrie Hughes began moving around the country in search of better job opportunities. Young Langston ended up living in six different cities by the time he was 12. In fact, he once claimed that he had slept in 10,000 beds as a child. Books became the only constant presence in his life. He read a wide range of books, from the Bible to novels by Mark Twain, and lost himself in the pages. "Books began to happen to me, and I began to believe in nothing but books and the wonderful world in books," he noted.

As his mother traveled in search of work, Hughes spent a great deal of time living with his maternal grandmother, Mary Leary Langston, in

Lawrence, Kansas. His grandmother taught him to be proud of his African heritage and to stand up against discrimination. Throughout his childhood, she told him "long beautiful stories about people who wanted to make the Negroes free," he remembered. "Through my grandmother's stories always life moved, moved heroically toward an end. Nobody ever cried in my grandmother's stories. They worked, or schemed, or fought. But no crying. . . . Something about my grandmother's stories (without her ever having said so) taught me the uselessness of crying about anything."

Throughout his childhood, [Hughes's grandmother] told him "long beautiful stories about people who wanted to make the Negroes free. Through my grandmother's stories always life moved, moved heroically toward an end. Nobody ever cried in my grandmother's stories. They worked, or schemed, or fought. But no crying. . . . Something about my grandmother's stories (without her ever having said so) taught me the uselessness of crying about anything."

EDUCATION

As a boy, Hughes attended an otherwise all-white elementary school in Topeka, Kansas, called the Harrison Street School. Some of the children were mean to him because he was black, but others were friendly and helpful. Hughes was an excellent student and always got good grades. When it came time for graduation, his classmates unexpectedly voted him the class poet. He ended up writing an original poem for the graduation ceremony. "They had elected all the class officers, but there was no one in our class who looked like a poet, or had ever written a poem," Hughes recalled. "In America most white people think, of course, that all Negroes can sing and dance, and have a sense of rhythm. So my classmates, knowing that a poem had to be written, elected me unanimously—thinking, no doubt, that I had some, being a Negro. . . . That was the way I began to write poetry."

By the time Hughes entered high school, he had joined his mother and stepfather in Cleveland, Ohio. As a student at Central High School, he ran track, edited the yearbook, and acted in dramatic productions. He also read the poetry of Paul Lawrence Dunbar and Carl Sandburg and began to write poems of his own. "I wrote about love, about the steel mills where

my stepfather worked, the slums where we lived, and the brown girls from the South, prancing up and down Central Avenue on a spring day," he noted.

During his high school years, Hughes organized a protest against racial discrimination. One of his teachers moved all the black children in the class into one row, away from the white students. Hughes grew angry at this unfair treatment. He protested by putting signs that said "Jim Crow Row" on the black students' seats. At that time, some parts of the country had "Jim Crow" laws that segregated people by race. These laws required African-Americans to use separate movie theaters, restaurants, schools, restrooms, and drinking fountains than white people. The laws discriminated against black people and kept them in an inferior position in American society. Hughes's teacher did not like the signs and expelled him from school. But when black families in the community rallied around him, the teacher allowed him to return to class and eliminated the special row for black students.

"My father hated Negroes. I think he hated himself, too, for being a Negro. My father had a great contempt for all poor people. He thought it was their own fault they were poor. . . . That summer in Mexico was the most miserable I have ever known."

After graduating from high school in 1919, Hughes went to visit his father in Mexico. It was the first time he had seen his father since he was a little boy. The visit was a disappointing one for Hughes. Although his father was a successful lawyer and businessman, he found that he could not admire or even like him because of his racist attitudes. "My father hated Negroes. I think he hated himself, too, for being a Negro," he noted. "My father had a great contempt for all poor people. He thought it was their own fault they were poor. . . . That summer in Mexico was the most miserable I have ever known."

But the trip to Mexico did have two positive results for Hughes. First, he wrote a poem on the train trip that ended up being published in a magazine. Called "The Negro Speaks of Rivers," this poem suddenly popped into his head as he traveled across the country. It traces the relationship of black people to rivers around the world through history, and it remains one of his best-known poems. Second, Hughes convinced his father to pay for him to attend college. On his father's recommendation, he attended Columbia University in New York City. But he did not like the school and

quit after his first year. He eventually completed his education at Lincoln University in Pennsylvania, earning a bachelor's degree in 1929.

CAREER HIGHLIGHTS

Langston Hughes was one of the first prominent African-American writers. He published a wide variety of works over the course of his long career, including poetry, plays, short stories, novels, newspaper columns, political essays, children's books, and two autobiographies. In all of his books, Hughes captured the experiences and feelings of average black people as they worked, raised families, and struggled to gain equal rights in American society. Many of his poems and stories feature maids, waiters, factory workers, and other ordinary people.

> *"Some African-Americans believed that Hughes should present only positive pictures of well-educated, successful blacks. "I sympathized deeply with those critics and those intellectuals, and I saw clearly the need for some of the kinds of books they wanted. But I did not see how they could expect every Negro author to write such books. I didn't know the upper-class Negroes well enough to write much about them. I knew only the people I had grown up with, and they weren't people whose shoes were always shined, who had been to Harvard, or who had heard of Bach. But they seemed to me good people, too."*

Hughes was one of the earliest writers to incorporate the rhythms of street speech, ethnic dialects, and jazz and blues music in his poetry. Because his poems centered around recognizable people, used familiar words and rhythms, and usually presented an optimistic view of human nature, they became very popular among a wide audience. Only a few of Hughes's books were written specifically for children or young adults, but most of his work is accessible to and enjoyed by young readers.

Although Hughes enjoyed great success during his lifetime, he was also a somewhat controversial figure. Some African-Americans resented his use of street language and his focus on lower-class blacks. They felt that this reinforced negative stereotypes of black people. They believed that black writers should present only positive pictures of well-edu-

cated, successful African-Americans. "I sympathized deeply with those critics and those intellectuals, and I saw clearly the need for some of the kinds of books they wanted. But I did not see how they could expect every Negro author to write such books," Hughes responded. "I didn't know the upper-class Negroes well enough to write much about them. I knew only the people I had grown up with, and they weren't people whose shoes were always shined, who had been to Harvard, or who had heard of [classical music composer Johann Sebastian] Bach. But they seemed to me good people, too."

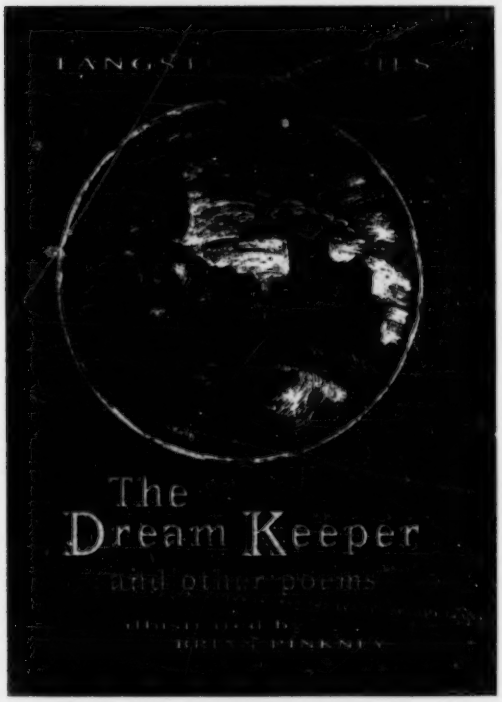
Hughes working as a busboy, in about 1925.

The Harlem Renaissance

After dropping out of Columbia University, Hughes decided to further his education by traveling around the world. He began by signing up to work on a ship sailing to Africa. After that he spent time in Paris, France, and then went on to Spain. In 1924, Hughes returned to the United States and lived with his mother in a small, unheated apartment in Washington, D.C. He worked at a number of odd jobs during this time, including as a cook, waiter, and doorman. He also continued to write poetry, including several poems based on the rhythms of black spirituals and blues music.

One day, while he was working as a busboy in a Washington hotel, Hughes saw the well-known poet Vachel Lindsay in the restaurant. He summoned up his courage and dropped by Lindsay's table with some copies of his poems. Lindsay was very impressed. At a poetry reading later that night, Lindsay claimed that he had "discovered" a new young poet.

Every chance he got, Hughes went to the Harlem section of New York City. At this time, Harlem was undergoing a cultural renaissance. Strong black leaders, like Booker T. Washington and W.E.B. DuBois, had recently emerged to demand equality for African-Americans. Numerous black artists, musicians, and writers flocked to Harlem and began producing exciting new works that were inspired by the changes then taking place in society. Over the next few years, Hughes published several more poems in magazines and won awards for his work. He soon became a prominent figure in the African-American cultural, literary, and artistic



movement that became known as the Harlem Renaissance. In fact, he was known by the nickname "Poet Laureate of Harlem."

Hughes published his first book of poetry, *The Weary Blues,* in 1926. In this collection, he used the rhythms of blues and jazz music to re-create the exciting atmosphere of Harlem at night. For example, the title poem, according to Hughes, talked about "a working man who sang the blues all night and then went to bed and slept like a rock." He also included a few poems about African-American history and the racial issues that divided the country. The volume received a great deal of praise from critics for its perceptive view of the black experience. Writing in *Dictionary of Literary Biography,* Winifred Bevilacqua claimed that *The Weary Blues* proved that the speech patterns of ordinary African-Americans and "the rhythms of blues, jazz, and spirituals could be made a part of the art of poetry."

The following year, Hughes published a second book of poetry called *Fine Clothes to the Jew.* This collection was well-received by white critics, but it created a great deal of controversy among African-American reviewers. Black critics tended to resent his use of street language and his portraits of lower-class blacks. In fact, headlines in black newspapers called it "trash," and some reviewers referred to Hughes as the "poet low-rate" (rather than the honorary title "poet laureate") of Harlem. "The Negro critics did not like it at all," he admitted. "[They] called the book a disgrace to the race, a return to the dialect tradition, and a parading of all our racial defects before the public. . . . The Negro critics and many of the intellectuals were very sensitive about their race in books. (And still are.) In anything that white people were likely to read, they wanted to put their best foot forward, their politely polished and cultural foot — and only that foot."

Writing for Children and Adults

In the late 1920s, Hughes returned to college at Lincoln University. But he continued writing in his spare time and visited Harlem on weekends and

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during the summers. In 1930, the year after he earned his bachelor's degree, he published his first novel, *Not without Laughter.* This book tells the story of a black boy named Sandy growing up in Kansas during the early 1900s. Partly based on Hughes's own experiences, it received praise for showing the challenges African-American families faced. In fact, reviewer David Littlejohn wrote in *Black on White* that "it is probably the most genuine inside view of Negro life available in the fiction of the period."

In 1932, Hughes published his first books for young people. He collaborated with his friend Arna Bontemps on a book called *Popo and Fifina: Children of Haiti.* This book teaches children about peasant life in the Caribbean islands through a series of light-hearted stories about two Haitian children and their family. Hughes also combined 59 poems from his first two poetry collections with some unpublished poems he had written as a young man and published them in a special volume called *The Dream Keeper.* In her introduction to the book, Effie Powers claimed that Hughes's work appealed to young people because the poet had "a love of beauty, a zest for adventure, a sense of humor, pride in his own race, and faith in humanity." *The Dream Keeper* remains popular among older children and young adults.

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> ***"It is hard to name a writer today who comes close to Langston Hughes's remarkable stylistic breadth, let along his capacity to express the pain of inequality without losing the joy of creativity."***
> ***— Eric J. Sundquist,***
> **Commentary**
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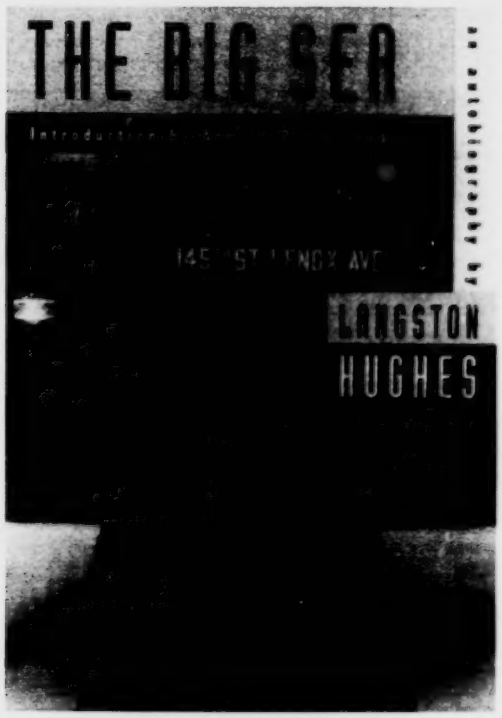
Throughout the 1930s, Hughes continued to travel around the world. One important trip took him to the Soviet Union, where he became interested in communism. Communism is a political system in which the government controls all resources and means of producing wealth. By eliminating private property, this system is designed to create a society where there are no social classes and where everyone is equal. In practice, however, it often limits personal freedom and individual rights.

Hughes encountered less discrimination in the Soviet Union than he had in the United States. He also learned that the Soviet government provided education and health care to all of its people. He came to believe that some aspects of communism might improve conditions for African-Americans in the United States.



After visiting the Soviet Union, Hughes included more radical themes of social protest in his writing. Critics first noticed this change in his book *The Ways of White Folks,* published in 1934. This collection of short stories examines the relationship between black and white Americans from a black perspective. It also includes several scenes of violence and tragedy. In the story "Home," for example, a black musician is killed by an angry mob of white people who misinterpret his actions when he tries to help a white woman. In an article for *Commentary,* Eric J. Sundquist said the stories provide a "damning indictment of American racism in an inventive range of settings." He also called *The Ways of White Folks* "one of the most powerful collections in the history of the American short story."

In 1935, one of Hughes's plays was produced on Broadway for the first time. *Mulatto* is a tragic drama about a mixed-race man named Bert, his black mother, and his white father. Bert ends up killing his father and then committing suicide. Unfortunately, the play received mostly unfavorable reviews. Hughes wrote many more plays over the years, including *Front Porch* (1937), *Little Eva's End* (1938), *The Sun Do Move* (1942), and *Black Nativity* (1961). But he never received the same level of critical acclaim as a playwright that he received as a poet. "He was not a finished craftsman and not a first-rank playwright," Milton Melzer explained in his biography *Langston Hughes.* "He could create delightful characters and dialogue, and work up some effective scenes, but he could not sustain a large-scale work."

In 1940, Hughes published the first of his two autobiographies, *The Big Sea.* In this book, he discusses his childhood, education, and early writing career. The title of the book came from his feeling that "Literature is a big sea full of many fish. I let down my nets and pulled." The volume ends with the decline of the Harlem Renaissance in the early 1930s. Critics praised *The Big Sea* for providing a warm, entertaining, yet realistic look at the early life of a black writer. In his review of the book, author Richard Wright noted that Hughes had overcome many obstacles to develop "a range of artistic inter-

est and expression possessed by no other Negro writer of his time" and become a "cultural ambassador" for African-Americans.

The Simple Truth

During the 1940s, Hughes wrote a column for a black newspaper called the *Chicago Defender.* In 1943, he created a character named Jesse B. Semple (intended to be read as "Just Be Simple") for his newspaper column. "Simple" is a black man from the rural American South who comes to the industrial North hoping to escape racism and find work. He soon finds that discrimination exists in the northern United States too—it is just more subtle than in the South. In his columns featuring Simple, Hughes used his character's folksy wisdom, down-home humor, and common sense to make satirical comments about race relations in America.

> *People responded to Hughes's character Jesse B. Simple, according to a reviewer for* Black World. *"Simple lived in a world they knew, suffered their pangs, experienced their joys, reasoned in their way, talked their talk, dreamed their dreams, laughed their laughs, voiced their fears—and all the while underneath, he affirmed the wisdom which anchored at the base of their lives."*

Some people criticized Hughes's columns for making fun of racial discrimination. But he believed that humor was an important weapon in the fight for equal rights. "If Negroes took all the white world's boorishness to heart and wept over it as profoundly as our serious writers do, we would have been dead long ago," he explained. "The race problem in America is serious business, I admit. But must it *always* be written about seriously? So many weighty volumes, cheerless novels, sad tracts, and violent books have been written on race relations that I would like to see some writers of both races write about our problems with black tongue in white cheek, or vice versa. Sometimes I try. Simple helps me."

But while critics complained, many readers grew to love Simple. "The people responded," a reviewer for *Black World* said. "Simple lived in a world they knew, suffered their pangs, experienced their joys, reasoned in their way, talked their talk, dreamed their dreams, laughed their laughs, voiced their fears—and all the while underneath, he affirmed the wisdom which

anchored at the base of their lives." Simple became one of Hughes's most popular characters. He eventually published a whole series of books containing Simple stories, including *Simple Speaks His Mind* (1950), *Simple Takes a Wife* (1953), *Simple Stakes a Claim* (1957), and *Simple's Uncle Sam* (1965).

Later Works Grow Angrier

During the 1950s, Hughes published several works for young people, including a series of books of African-American history. In such books as *The First Book of Negroes* (1952), *The First Book of Jazz* (1955), *Famous Negro Heroes of America* (1958), and *The First Book of Africa* (1960), he introduced students to various aspects of black culture. Hughes also published the second volume of his autobiography, *I Wonder as I Wander,* in 1956. In this book, he tells stories about his travels all over the world. "Most of my life from childhood on has been spent moving, traveling, changing places, knowing people in one school, in one town, or in one group, or on one ship a little while, but soon never seeing most of them again," he noted.

Many of Hughes's early works expressed his hope for positive changes in race relations in the United States. But by the 1960s, when the civil rights movement got underway, he had grown increasingly angry and frustrated with the discrimination blacks faced in American society. His poetry of this period reflected his negative feelings. For example, *The Panther and the Lash* (1967) has been called "the least cheerful, the least optimistic of Hughes's volumes of poetry." In such poems as "Words on Fire," "Junior Addict," and "Dream Deferred," Hughes expresses his growing anger at the slow pace of social change. He even warns that continued discrimination might cause African-Americans to resort to violence.

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> *"The folks back home understood Langston Hughes because his poetry was simple and powerful. He communicated with a folk poetry that outlives the elaborate and the gorgeous. Whether it was in children's gentle verses or blues or 'protest' lines, he remained the poet of the people. This was his greatest strength."*
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> *— James Presley,*
> Southwest Review
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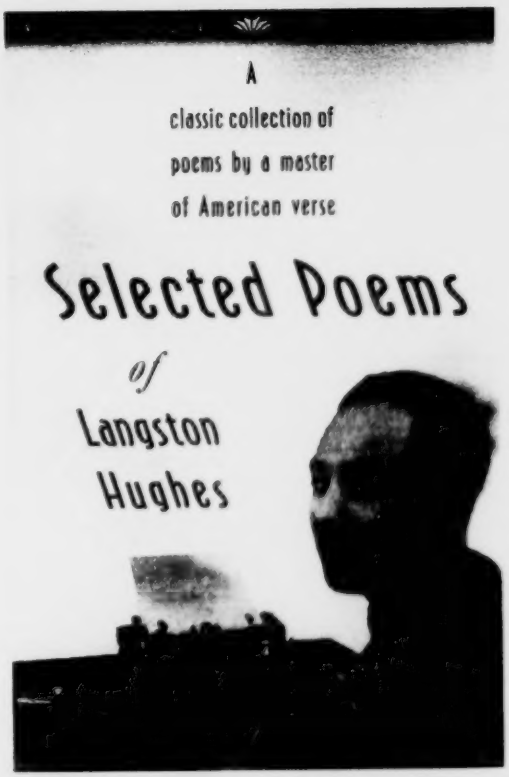
Death and Legacy

Langston Hughes died on May 22, 1967, in a New York hospital from complications following prostate surgery. Several collections of his work, as well as previously unpub-

lished poems and stories, came out following his death. One of these books was perhaps his best known collection of poetry for children, *Don't You Turn Back.* Writing in *Saturday Review,* Zena Sutherland said that these poems "are brief, childlike in their simplicity, and timeless in their interpretations of black dreams, sea-longing, or the triumphant affirmation of faith."



Hughes's poems continue to be popular with young people and adults alike. Such poems as "The Negro Speaks of Rivers," "The Weary Blues," "Theme for English B," and "Dream Variations" appear in numerous anthologies of poetry. Two of Hughes's most famous poems discuss his views on the discrimination faced by African-Americans in the United States. In "I, Too, Sing America," he expresses hope that the "darker brother," who is forced to eat in the kitchen when company comes, will someday be treated as an equal. In "Let America Be America Again," he argues that the "American dream" of freedom and equality for all people is not real for African-Americans, poor whites, Native Americans, or immigrants.

Today, Hughes is remembered not only for his own wide range of writing, but also for his influence on other black writers. He edited and published anthologies of the works of young African-Americans during his lifetime. He also helped start several influential black theater companies. But most of all, his success encouraged many other African-Americans to pursue a career in writing or the arts. In 1991, on the 89th anniversary of his birth, a number of black writers attended a ceremony recognizing Hughes's impact. His cremated remains were placed under a specially decorated tile floor at the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture in Harlem. The poet Maya Angelou and other celebrities performed a traditional African folk dance in his honor during the ceremony.

"It is hard to name a writer today who comes close to Langston Hughes's remarkable stylistic breadth, let along his capacity to express the pain of inequality without losing the joy of creativity," Eric J. Sundquist wrote.

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A photo of Hughes by renowned African-American photographer Gordon Parks.

"The folks back home understood Langston Hughes because his poetry was simple and powerful," James Presley added in *Southwest Review*. "He communicated with a folk poetry that outlives the elaborate and the gorgeous. Whether it was in children's gentle verses or blues or 'protest' lines, he remained the poet of the people. This was his greatest strength."

HOME AND FAMILY

Hughes never married or had children. He reportedly had relationships with both men and women during his lifetime, and several biographers have speculated that he was homosexual. In any case, he seemed to place greater importance on his work than on romantic relationships.

SELECTED WRITINGS

Poetry

The Weary Blues, 1926
Fine Clothes to the Jew, 1927
Dear Lovely Death, 1931
The Negro Mother and Other Dramatic Recitations, 1931
Scottsboro Limited: Four Poems and a Play, 1932
A New Song, 1938
Shakespeare in Harlem, 1942
Freedom's Plow, 1943
Jim Crow's Last Stand, 1943
Lament for Dark Peoples and Other Poems, 1944
Fields of Wonder, 1947
One-Way Ticket, 1949
Montage of a Dream Deferred, 1951
Selected Poems, 1959
Ask Your Mama: 12 Moods for Jazz, 1961
The Panther and the Lash: Poems of Our Times, 1967
The Collected Poems of Langston Hughes, 1994

Plays

Mule Bone, 1930 (with Zora Neale Hurston)
Little Ham, 1935
Mulatto, 1935
Front Porch, 1937
Joy to My Soul, 1937
Little Eva's End, 1938
The Sun Do Move, 1942
For This We Fight, 1943
The Barrier, 1950
Esther, 1957
Black Nativity, 1961
Five Plays by Langston Hughes, 1963
The Prodigal Son, 1965
The Political Plays of Langston Hughes, 2000

Fiction

Not without Laughter, 1930 (novel)
The Ways of White Folks, 1934

Simple Speaks His Mind, 1950
Laughing to Keep from Crying, 1952
Simple Takes a Wife, 1953
Simple Stakes a Claim, 1957
Tambourines to Glory, 1958 (novel)
Something in Common and Other Stories, 1963
Simple's Uncle Sam, 1965
The Best of Simple, 1961
Not So Simple: The "Simple" Stories by Langston Hughes, 1996
Short Stories of Langston Hughes, 1996

Nonfiction

A Negro Looks at Soviet Central Asia, 1934
The Big Sea, 1940 (autobiography)
The Sweet Flypaper of Life, 1955 (with Roy de Carava)
A Pictorial History of the Negro in America, 1956 (with Milton Meltzer)
I Wonder as I Wander, 1956 (autobiography)
Fight for Freedom: The Story of the NAACP, 1962
Black Magic: A Pictorial History of the Negro in American Entertainment, 1967 (with Milton Meltzer)
Good Morning Revolution: The Uncollected Social Protest Writings of Langston Hughes, 1973
Arna Bontemps-Langston Hughes Letters: 1925-1967, 1980

Other

The Langston Hughes Reader, 1968
Selected Stories and Poems, 1999

For Young People

Popo and Fifina: Children of Haiti, 1932 (with Arna Bontemps)
The Dream Keeper, 1932 (poems)
The First Book of Negroes, 1952
Famous American Negroes, 1954
The First Book of Rhythms, 1954
Famous Negro Music Makers, 1955
The First Book of Jazz, 1955
The First Book of the West Indies, 1956
Famous Negro Heroes of America, 1958
The First Book of Africa, 1960
Black Misery, 1969

Don't You Turn Back, 1969 (poems)
Thank You, M'am, 1993
The Sweet and Sour Animal Book, 1994
The Block: Poems, 1995
The Pasteboard Bandit, 1997 (with Arna Bontemps)
Carol of the Brown King: Poems, 1998

HONORS AND AWARDS

First Prize in Poetry (*Opportunity* Magazine Literary Contest): 1925
Amy Spingarn Poetry and Essay Prizes (*Crisis* Magazine): 1925
Wittner Bynner Poetry Prize: 1926
Intercollegiate Poetry Award (*Palms* Magazine): 1927
Harmon Gold Medal for Literature: 1931, for *Not without Laughter*
Rosenwald Fellowship: 1931, 1941
Guggenheim Fellowship: 1935
National Institute and American Academy of Arts and Letters Award in Literature: 1946
Anisfield-Wolf Award for Best Book on Race Relations: 1953, for *First Book of Africa*
Spingarn Medal (National Association for the Advancement of Colored People): 1960

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McElmeel, Sharron L. *100 Most Popular Children's Authors,* 1999
McKissack, Patricia and Frederick. *Langston Hughes: Great American Poet,* 1992 (juvenile)
Meltzer, Milton. *Langston Hughes,* 1997 (juvenile)
Notable Black American Men, 1998
Osofsky, Audrey. *Free to Dream: The Making of a Poet, Langston Hughes,* 1996 (juvenile)
Rampersad, Arnold. *The Life of Langston Hughes, Volume One: 1902-1941,* 1986
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Walker, Alice. *Langston Hughes, American Poet,* 1974 (juvenile)

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Commentary, Dec. 1996, p.55
Current Biography 1940
Ebony, May 1991, p.81
Jet, Feb. 25, 1991, p.34
Los Angeles Times, Feb. 24, 1991, p.4
New York Times, May 23, 1967, p.1; Feb. 10, 1991, p.B5
New York Times Book Review, Oct. 12, 1986, p.7; Oct. 9, 1988, p.1
Newsweek, June 5, 1967, p.104
Saturday Review, May 9, 1970, p.47
Southwest Review, Winter 1969, p.79

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Black Americans of Achievement, Vol. 19: Langston Hughes, 1994

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http://www.redhotjazz.com/hughes.html
http://www.pbs.org/wnet/ihas/poet/hughes.html
http://www.bookwire.com/bbr/poetry/collected-langston-hughes.html

Stan Lee 1922-

American Comic Book Writer and Publisher
Creator of Spider-Man, the Incredible Hulk,
the Fantastic Four, the X-Men, and Other Famous
Comic Book Superheroes

BIRTH

Stanley Martin Lieber was born on December 28, 1922, in New York City. He legally changed his name to Stan Lee during adulthood. His parents were Jack Lieber, a dress cutter, and Celia (Solomon) Lieber, a homemaker. He had one younger brother, Larry.

YOUTH

Lee grew up during a period in American history known as the Great Depression. During this era, which lasted for much of the 1930s, America and many other countries suffered a severe economic downturn. Millions of people had trouble finding jobs and providing food and shelter for their families. Lee's father was one of many people who endured long stretches of unemployment during this period. Stan Lee's childhood home was a small three-room apartment in the section of New York City known as Manhattan. "I slept in the living room until I was old enough to need my privacy," he remembered. His family's modest economic situation made it difficult for his parents to find a larger home.

Despite the hardships of growing up during the Depression, Lee remembers his childhood as being a happy one in many respects. He was a lively and outgoing boy who loved to entertain his friends and family, and by his early teens he was taking part in local theater productions. He remembers his mother as a source of constant encouragement to him during this time. "Whenever I walked in the door, she'd ask me why some talent scout hadn't whisked me off the street and taken me straight to Hollywood," he recalled.

"I used to read everything. I loved to read. I used to read the labels on the ketchup bottle. I had books like Tarzan, Mark Twain, the Hardy Boys."

Lee also became attracted to reading at an early age. "I used to read everything," he said. "I loved to read. I used to read the labels on the ketchup bottle. I had books like Tarzan, Mark Twain, the Hardy Boys." As his enjoyment of literature grew, he passed many afternoons writing and drawing his own little stories and comic strips.

EDUCATION

Lee attended De Witt Clinton High School in Manhattan, where he balanced his class load with a variety of extracurricular activities. In addition to participating with local theater groups and writing stories, he also took a variety of after-school jobs. During his senior year of high school alone, he worked as a movie theater usher, wrote publicity releases for a local hospital, and composed obituaries for a newspaper service. He graduated from De Witt Clinton High in 1939 at age 16.

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BECOMING A WRITER

As high school graduation approached, Lee was not sure what sort of career he should pursue. But around this time, he had an experience that pointed him in the right direction. "In those days the New York *Herald Tribune* ran a weekly essay contest open to all high school students," Lee remembered. "It was called 'The Biggest News of the Week Contest,' and the purpose was, as you'd expect, to write the most spell-binding essay in so many words or less on what you considered the most momentous news event of the past week. Either no one else was entering, or I was an embryonic Walter Cronkite [a famous television newsman of the 1960s and 1970s] . . . but I won three weeks in a row. One of the editors called to ask me to stop submitting entries and 'give someone else a chance.' If I hadn't yet made a life's commitment, he said, I might consider becoming a writer."

Shortly after graduating from high school, Lee learned of a job opening for an editorial assistant at a New York comic book publishing company called Timely Comics. Delighted at the idea of being paid to work on comic books, Lee applied for the job. He was thrilled to get the position, even though he spent as much time running errands and doing office work as he did working as a proofreader and writer on the comics. A few months later, he received a big break that vaulted him into an important position with the company. "The editor and the head artist left and I was asked if I thought I could fill in as editor until the publisher could find someone else," Lee recalled. "I said sure. At the age of 17, I didn't know any better."

As head editor, Lee was responsible for supervising the writers and artists who produced the company's comics and ensuring that the comics were of good quality. He found many aspects of the position to be challenging, especially for a 17-year-old with little practical experience in the world of comic book publishing. But as Lee himself notes, he evidently did a pretty good job, because the publisher never hired a replacement. Instead, Lee remained in the position for the next three decades.

CAREER HIGHLIGHTS

Writing Comics in the 1940s and 1950s

During the 1940s and 1950s Lee worked as the company's editor and also as one of its main writers. His only break from the world of comics came during World War II, when he served in the U.S. Army from 1942 to 1945 (he left the service as a sergeant). During these two decades, Timely Comics

changed its name first to Atlas Comics and finally to Marvel Comics. But although the name of the company changed, Lee recalled that the comic books themselves did not change very much from year to year. Instead, Marvel and other companies in the industry seemed to churn out the same stale combination of superhero, humor, and crime comics every year.

The comic book publishers of this era did not want to tinker with their safe—if boring—strategy of producing simple, easy-to-understand comics for their young audiences. The publisher was afraid that challenging material would turn off comic book buyers. So writers, editors, and artists were discouraged from developing original storylines, creating new and interesting characters, or examining social issues. "The problem with comics is that for so many years they were at the bottom of the barrel of the arts because everybody felt they were just for little kids who can't read anyway, and they're stupid or they wouldn't be reading comics," said Lee. "Even the people in the business didn't consider it a real art form."

"I've always believed in good dialogue, good characterization, good story structures. But I wasn't able at first to apply my beliefs because of the way the people in charge felt comics should be done. That's the reason I changed my name to Stan Lee, because I never thought all that much of comics when I started and didn't even want to use my real name. I was saving that for the Great American Novel."

"I've always believed in good dialogue, good characterization, good story structures," added Lee. "But I wasn't able at first to apply my beliefs because of the way the people in charge felt comics should be done. That's the reason I changed my name to Stan Lee, because I never thought all that much of comics when I started and didn't even want to use my real name. I was saving that for the Great American Novel."

Marvel also became one of many comic book publishers that struggled to survive financially during the 1950s. Lee remembered one occasion in which his publisher forced him to fire his entire staff of more than 50 people because business was so bad. "Firing people is horrendous," he recalled. "They weren't just workers. They were people I had worked *with;* they were friends. Luckily, we were able to hire many of them back before too much time had passed."

Lee with creations old and new from his 60 years in cartoons.

Taking a Chance on a New Kind of Comic

By the late 1950s Lee was beginning to feel like he needed to make a career change. "Personally, I was bored," he said. "I had 20 years of writing and editing comics behind me. . . . Twenty years of worrying whether a sentence or phrase might be over the head of an eight-year-old reader. Twenty years of trying to think like a child."

In 1960 Lee announced to his wife that he planned to quit working for Marvel and try to find a new job that would not frustrate him so much. But she replied, "You know, all these years you've said that these comics are being done the wrong way and you wish you had a chance to do them the way you want to do them. . . . If you're going to leave anyway, before you go, why don't you just write some books the way you feel you'd like to do them? What have you got to lose?"

"For just this once, I would do the type of story I myself would enjoy reading if I were a comic-book reader. And the characters would be the kind of characters I could personally relate to; they'd be flesh and blood, they'd have their faults and foibles, they'd be fallible and feisty, and—most important of all—inside their colorful, costumed booties they'd still have feet of clay."

Lee realized that she was right, and he immediately started scheming to put together a different kind of comic book. "For just this once, I would do the type of story I myself would enjoy reading if I were a comic-book reader," he said. "And the characters would be the kind of characters I could personally relate to; they'd be flesh and blood, they'd have their faults and foibles, they'd be fallible and feisty, and—most important of all—inside their colorful, costumed booties they'd still have feet of clay."

Creating the Fantastic Four

Over the next several months, Lee and legendary comic book artist Jack Kirby worked on a new story about four characters exposed to radiation during a space flight. The radiation gives the characters—Mr. Fantastic, the Invisible Girl, the Human Torch, and the Thing—a wide range of amazing powers. Mr. Fantastic, for example, is suddenly able to bend and lengthen his body into all sorts of incredible shapes, while the Invisible Girl can make herself disappear at will. But Lee added some unusual wrinkles to his plot. He made the Human Torch, who can turn into flame and throw fireballs, a sulky and unreliable teenager. And he developed the story so that the radiation gave Ben Grimm—the so-called Thing—awesome strength, but at the expense of transforming him into an ugly rock-like creature who is agonized to discover that he is unable to regain his lost human form.

The first issue of *The Fantastic Four* was published in early 1961, and it immediately created a sensation at Marvel. Sales of the comic soared, and the company received its first-ever wave of fan mail. "[The fan mail] was one of the most exciting things that ever happened to us," Lee recalled. "We found out that there were actually real live readers out there—readers who took the trouble to contact us, readers who wanted to talk to us about our characters, about our stories. With each new letter they got to know us better, and what was more important, we got to know them."

The Incredible Hulk and Spider-Man

Encouraged by the reaction to *The Fantastic Four,* Lee abandoned his plans to leave Marvel. Instead, he decided to try his hand at inventing other new superheroes. His next creation was the Incredible Hulk, a foul-tempered, green-skinned monster armed with incredible strength. Lee borrowed from the story of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde in creating the Hulk. He developed a plotline in which the Hulk is actually housed inside the body of mild-mannered nuclear scientist Bruce Banner. During times of great stress, however, Banner is transformed into the Hulk. The Hulk—which also was first illustrated by Kirby—made his first appearance in 1962, and it was an immediate sensation with comic book readers as well.

Lee's next creation, however, proved to be the most popular character of all. As Lee pondered his next superhero, he decided that he wanted to create "a very human guy, someone who makes mistakes, who worries, gets acne, has trouble with his girlfriend, things like that." Lee thought that it would be interesting to create a superhero who was in most respects an average man, except that he happened to have super powers.

Over the next several weeks, Lee and artist Steve Ditko developed a story in which a teenager named Peter Parker is bitten by a radioactive spider. The insect bite gives Parker a range of nifty powers, including increased strength and the ability to cling to walls and ceilings, but it does not transform his personality. Instead, Parker remains an insecure young man who initially shows more interest in using his new powers for making money than fighting crime. But when this selfish attitude triggers a series of events that ends with the death of his beloved uncle, Parker assumes the identity of Spider-Man and dedicates his life to fighting evil.

Spider-Man, who first appeared in 1962 in a comic called *Amazing Fantasy,* quickly became Marvel's most popular character. Delighted by Spider-Man's popularity, Lee worked even harder to create a comic that was unlike any other magazine on the market. He explored the character's everyday struggles to find happiness. He also surrounded Spider-Man with a

Lee breaks up a fight in a Los Angeles book store between Spider-Man and Batman, 1995.

wide range of interesting villains and other characters, from hot-tempered newspaper publisher J. Jonah Jameson to sweet Aunt May. "The deeper I dug under Spidey's skin to see what made him tick, the more I realized how embarrassingly banal had been the comics of the past few decades in terms of characterization," said Lee. "The so-called good guys were always invincible, infallible, and totally triumphant at the end of each story. The bad guys were always dastardly, deadly, and irrevocably eradicated by the time the final curtain rang down. The good guys talked lyrically. The bad guys grunted. The good guys were pure at heart, proud, and passionately patriotic. The bad guys were cowards, cutthroats, and craven to the core."

The "Marvel Era" of Comic Books

Lee continued to create memorable and highly popular characters for Marvel throughout the mid-1960s. Notable superheroes who emerged during this period included the Mighty Thor, a long-haired, hammer-throwing version of the God of Thunder of Norse mythology; Dr. Strange, a sorcerer with strange and wondrous powers; and the X-Men, a group of misunderstood mutants with a variety of superpowers.

63

All of these characters were warmly welcomed by American comic book audiences. Together with Spider-Man, the Hulk, and the Fantastic Four, they formed a potent line-up of superheroes that pushed Marvel to the top of the comic book industry. As Marvel's sales soared, Lee made sure that he and the other writers continued to develop plotlines that explored the human side of both the heroes and the villains. All the comics featured heroes who were flawed in some way or who struggled with human emotions and desires. The personalities of many of the villains were also fleshed out. Many of them operated out of selfish or evil motives, but others were given admirable qualities or made sympathetic in one way or another. "I've always believed that the only thing that will sell is quality writing, believability," Lee said. "The reader has to care about a character, and in order to care, he's got to believe in the character."

"The deeper I dug under Spidey's skin to see what made him tick, the more I realized how embarrassingly banal had been the comics of the past few decades in terms of characterization. The so-called good guys were always invincible, infallible, and totally triumphant at the end of each story. The bad guys were always dastardly, deadly, and irrevocably eradicated by the time the final curtain rang down. The good guys talked lyrically. The bad guys grunted. The good guys were pure at heart, proud, and passionately patriotic. The bad guys were cowards, cutthroats, and craven to the core."

By the early 1970s, Lee's self-described "innocent little crusade to upgrade comic books" had sparked a decade of tremendous growth in the comic book industry, with Marvel leading the way. During this period, Marvel continued to ignore conventional wisdom and introduce new innovations in storytelling. For example, Lee and the other writers began to produce storylines that continued over the course of several issues, instead of stories that neatly concluded at the end of each issue. "The reason we did continued stories was not to make [the audience] buy the next issue particularly," said Lee. "We could get better stories because by continuing the story to four or five issues, we could develop characterization and explore situations that we couldn't do with the shorter lengths."

> *"When people ask what I've written, Spider-Man is the first name that comes to my tongue. Also I guess Spider-Man is the one who's the most like me. . . . I think he's probably the most human superhero. He soliloquizes, and he worries, and he agonizes and wonders why things don't turn out better for him. He's always got money problems and allergies and dandruff. I like him. I think of him as the Woody Allen of superheroes."*

Marvel also continued to introduce such new and interesting characters as Daredevil, the first blind superhero, and black superheroes like Black Panther and Luke Cage. These characters appealed to a wide range of readers, from young children to college students. "For the younger reader, there were colorful costumes, action, excitement, fantasy, and bigger-than-life adventures," stated Lee. "For the . . . older reader, we offered unexpectedly sophisticated plots and subplots, a college-level vocabulary, satire, science fiction, and as many philosophical and sociological concepts as we could devise." Indeed, during the late 1960s and early 1970s Marvel became the first comic book publisher to address serious issues like drug abuse, pollution, racism, and the Watergate scandal (the political scandal that led to the resignation of President Richard Nixon in 1974).

Marvel's success also enabled Lee to launch a series of promotions that made Marvel fans feel like they were part of one big club. He included a page of letters from fans in each issue of every comic, and he gave members of the Marvel staff nicknames that were eagerly adopted by readers. He even introduced highly popular "No-Prizes." These were pieces of paper that were awarded to fans who detected errors in Marvel's storylines or drawings.

Becoming the Publisher at Marvel

In 1972 Lee left his duties as editor and writer behind and became Marvel's publisher. "I had been writing comics since 1940, so that had given me 30 years of comics writing," he explained. "I'd probably written more than anyone else." His new responsibilities made it impossible for him to serve as the regular writer for any of Marvel's series, but he still managed to maintain a high profile. For example, he contributed introduc-

tions to a series of books that reprinted the comics in which many of Marvel's most famous characters first appeared.

In the mid-1970s Lee assumed control of efforts to license some of Marvel's characters for movies. In 1978 he moved to Los Angeles, where he helped launch the successful "The Incredible Hulk" television series (it ran from 1978 to 1982). But even though his responsibilities as supervisor of Marvel's film licensing efforts kept Lee very busy, he still managed to find time to write and edit a new syndicated comic strip featuring Spider-Man.

Lee decided to work on the strip, which began in 1977 and continued to appear in more than 500 newspapers worldwide in the late 1990s, because of his enduring affection for the character. "I don't know whether I like him because I like him or because he's the best known [of the characters I created]," Lee confessed. "When people ask what I've written, Spider-Man is the first name that comes to my tongue. Also I guess Spider-Man is the one who's the most like me. . . . I think he's probably the most human superhero. He soliloquizes, and he worries, and he agonizes and wonders why things don't turn out better for him. He's always got money problems and allergies and dandruff. I like him. I think of him as the Woody Allen of superheroes."

Mongorr

Marvel's Popularity Plummets

In 1980 Lee was named to lead Marvel Productions Ltd., the movie and animation division of the Marvel Comics empire. But Lee's efforts to bring Marvel's heroes to television and movie theaters were hampered by legal squabbles over film contracts, ownership of the characters, and other issues. At the same time, Marvel's arch-rival, DC Comics, benefitted enormously from movies featuring its Superman and Batman characters. Around this same period, Lee's record as Marvel's publisher came under fire from people who

Thunderer

claimed that he treated Jack Kirby and other Marvel comic book writers and artists poorly over the years. As Maurice Horn commented in *The World Encyclopedia of Comics,* "his shabby treatment of Jack Kirby, Steve Ditko, and others of his most talented collaborators have drawn special criticism from fans and [comics] historians alike."

Despite Marvel's difficulties in bringing its characters to television and the movies, it remained the world's most successful comic book publisher through the early 1990s. In 1990, for example, the company sold 100 million comics worldwide and reported net earnings of $81 million. Lee's famous superheroes continued to account for most of these earnings, as fans snapped up comic books, toys, cartoons, and other merchandise featuring their favorite characters.

Lee, meanwhile, remained the most visible personality in the Marvel business empire. Widely credited as the creative force most responsible for Marvel's rise, he became known to many as the founding father of the "Marvel Age of Comics." In the early 1990s he was named chairman and publisher of Marvel comics and chairman of Marvel films.

During the mid-1990s, however, Lee and the rest of the company's leadership were rocked by terrible financial problems. First, Marvel's owners purchased the Fleer and Skybox trading card companies, only to see the market for trading cards decline dramatically within months of the acquisitions. The owners then directed Lee and other Marvel executives to expand the size and prices of its product line. But these decisions angered comic book fans, who felt that the company's decision to flood the market with pricey titles smacked of greediness. Thousands of fans subsequently abandoned Marvel for the offerings of other comic book publishers. Finally, a fierce struggle for ownership of Marvel and its many superhero characters erupted in 1996. This battle lasted for three years and pushed the company into bankruptcy and a total reorganization.

In 1998 Marvel began a slow march back to financial profitability. It received a much-needed boost from *Blade,* a popular motion picture based on one of its comic book characters. Other big-budget films featuring Marvel characters are also in the works. In addition, Lee led the company in a campaign to return its comic book line to the storytelling roots that had made it so popular in the first place. This initiative helped Marvel regain some of the audience that it had lost over the previous few years.

Launching a New Internet Venture

In November 1998 Lee and Marvel Comics reached agreement on a plan that freed him to explore new business opportunities outside of Marvel. He stepped down as chairman of Marvel Media, though he retained the honorary title of chairman emeritus. He also agreed to continue serving as a member of the company's editorial board. But the plan basically freed Lee to open his own business with new superhero characters, and to use classic Marvel characters like Spider-Man in the promotion of his new business ventures.

"We want to build a global community all around the world just as we did years ago in Marvel comics with fans who feel that they're more than just readers, more than just fans. [We want them to feel like] they're friends of ours. . . . I am very excited about using the power of the Internet to build a global community of young comic book enthusiasts to take the superhero tradition into the new millennium."

Lee wasted little time in beginning his new business. In 1999 he announced the creation of an Internet site (http://www.stanleemedia.com) that would feature new comic book characters and a wide range of information, games, and merchandise for comic books fans. "We want to build a global community all around the world just as we did years ago in Marvel comics with fans who feel that they're more than just readers, more than just fans," declared Lee. "[We want them to feel like] they're friends of ours. . . . I am very excited about using the power of the Internet to build a global community of young comic book enthusiasts to take the superhero tradition into the new millennium."

Lee's new Internet site launched in early 2000, with two new animated comic series: "The 7th Portal" and "The Backstreet Boys." Each will include

"In "The 7th Portal," his new animated comic on the Internet, Lee says that "Through some fantastic situations, [our heroes] are transported to another dimension, through the Internet, where they learn that our world is being menaced by a villain named Mongorr and his hordes. They will invade our world as soon as they can find the 7th Portal, the entrance to our world. It's our heroes who prevent them from finding the portal."

five-minute episodes (or "webisodes") that are the equivalent of a ten-page comic. "The 7th Portal" centers on a multicultural group of computer geeks who are transported through the Internet into another dimension. There, they gain super powers and battle the evil Mongorr. "The idea is that there are seven portals that lead to other dimensions. Mongorr has conquered the other six; the seventh leads to Earth," Lee explained. "Through some fantastic situations, [our heroes] are transported to another dimension, through the Internet, where they learn that our world is being menaced by a villain named Mongorr and his hordes. They will invade our world as soon as they can find the 7th Portal, the entrance to our world. It's our heroes who prevent them from finding the portal." Lee's other new comic series, "The Backstreet Boys," features the adventures of the singing group, whose members have all developed super powers. Here Backstreet Boy Nick Carter describes the story: "We start off as five performers onstage and we see a ship fly over the sky and we get amulets that pull our inner fantasies out and we develop super powers. Each one of the characters is great and shows a side of us that we would like to be. . . . Basically, we're all good guys trying to save the world."

MARRIAGE AND FAMILY

Lee married Joan Clayton Boocock on December 5, 1947. They have one child, Joan. Another daughter, Jan, died in infancy. The Lees live in the Los Angeles area.

HOBBIES AND OTHER INTERESTS

Lee continues to enjoy reading, but he admits that his business responsibilities often leave him with little time to read or pursue other hobbies.

SELECTED WRITINGS

Books

Spider-Man Collector's Album, 1966 (illustrated by Steve Ditko)
Origins of Marvel Comics, 1974
Son of Origins of Marvel Comics, 1975
Bring on the Bad Guys: Origins of Marvel Villains, 1976
Mighty Marvel Strength and Fitness Book, 1976
The Superhero Women, 1977
How to Draw Comics the Marvel Way, 1978 (with John Buscema)
Marvel's Greatest Superhero Battles, 1978
The Best of Spider-Man, 1986

In addition, Lee was the primary writer for many popular Marvel comic book series during the 1960s and early 1970s, including *The Amazing Spider-Man*, *The Incredible Hulk*, *The Mighty Thor*, and *The Fantastic Four*. He also authored several syndicated comic strips, including "Spider-Man."

HONORS AND AWARDS

Alley Award: 1963, 1964, 1965, 1966, 1967, 1968
Society for Comic Art Research and Preservation Award: 1968
Eureka Award (Il Targa—Italy): 1970, for best comic book writing in the world
Popular Culture Association Annual Award: 1974
Publisher of the Year Award (Periodical and Book Association of America): 1978

FURTHER READING

Books

Authors and Artists for Young Adults, Vol. 5, 1990
Contemporary Authors, Vol. 108, 1983
Goulart, Ron, ed. *Encyclopedia of American Comics*, 1990
Lee, Stan. *Origins of Marvel Comics*, 1974
Horn, Maurice, ed. *World Encyclopedia of Comics*, 1999
Nicholls, Peter, ed. *Encyclopedia of Science Fiction*, 1993
Who's Who in America, 2000

Periodicals

American Film, Oct. 1989, p.12
Current Biography 1993

New York Times, Oct. 21, 1999, p.G8; Dec. 20, 1999, p.C2
New York Times Magazine, May 2, 1971, p.32
People, Jan. 29, 1979, p.49
Quest, July/Aug., 1977, p.31
Rolling Stone, Sep. 16, 1971, p.29
Time, Feb. 5, 1979, p.138; Feb. 14, 2000, p.76
USA Today, Jan. 6, 1995, p.D8; Apr. 12, 2000, p.D1
Wall Street Journal, Aug. 23, 1999, p.B5
Washington Post, Dec. 18, 1979, p.B1; Feb. 4, 1992, p.D1

Videotapes

Stan Lee: The Comix-Man, A & E Biography, 1995

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Streak

WORLD WIDE WEB SITES

http://www.stanleemedia.com
http://www.marvel.com
http://www.zinezone.com/zines/arts/literature/comics/lee/

Julius Lester 1939-

American Writer, Professor, and Activist
Author of Stories, Folktales, and Nonfiction Works
about African-American and Jewish Life, Including
To Be a Slave and *Lovesong: Becoming a Jew*

BIRTH

Julius Bernard Lester was born on January 27, 1939, in St. Louis, Missouri. He was the son of W.D. Lester, a minister, and Julia (Smith) Lester.

YOUTH

Julius Lester grew up in the American South during a period in U.S. history in which black people did not enjoy the same basic civil rights as whites. Many laws in place at the time discriminated against blacks and placed them in an inferior position in American society. A policy known as "segregation"—in which "colored people" were required to use separate restrooms, schools, theaters, and restaurants than whites—was widespread throughout the country, and it was enforced with particular harshness in the South.

"I am angered and offended by white people who get nostalgic for the fifties," he said years later. "I have no nostalgia for segregation, for the 'No Colored Allowed' signs that covered the landscape like litter on the smooth green grass of a park. I have no nostalgia for a time when I endangered my life if, while downtown shopping with my parents, I raised my eyes and accidentally met the eyes of a white woman. Black men and boys were lynched for this during my childhood and adolescence. It is a world I recall with the pain of inner screaming in my ears."

During his childhood years in Arkansas, Kansas, and Tennessee, Lester experienced these unfair race-based laws firsthand. "I am angered and offended by white people who get nostalgic for the fifties," he said years later. "I have no nostalgia for segregation, for the 'No Colored Allowed' signs that covered the landscape like litter on the smooth green grass of a park. I have no nostalgia for a time when I endangered my life if, while downtown shopping with my parents, I raised my eyes and accidentally met the eyes of a white woman. Black men and boys were lynched for this during my childhood and adolescence. It is a world I recall with the pain of inner screaming in my ears."

Despite the atmosphere of what Lester called "deathly spiritual violence" that endured in the South during his childhood, he has many fond memories of his youth. Most of these center around his family, whom he credits with giving him a sense of pride in his black heritage. "Perhaps the most important influence in my growing up was my father, a Methodist minister from the South and a good storyteller," he said. "From him I absorbed so much of Southern rural black

traditions, particularly music and stories. Equally important were the summers spent at my maternal grandmother's in Arkansas as well as the adolescent years of my life in Nashville."

Lester had many different interests as a youngster. He developed into a talented and enthusiastic guitar and piano player, and he had a fine singing voice. But despite his musical abilities, his chief interest was literature. His lifelong love of books, which he once called "a sweet mystery," provided him with a gateway into worlds in which segregation and other grim aspects of black life in the South did not exist.

Forbidden from using Nashville's main library because of local segregation laws, Lester was forced to pick through the offerings of a small bookmobile that rolled through his neighborhood every few weeks. Most of the books he selected were westerns, detective stories, historical biographies, and comic books. As he grew older, however, he became dissatisfied with the books that were available to him. "I was never able to find any relationship between the world in children's books and the world in which I lived," he said. "There were no books which explained why I couldn't attend the white movie theaters or why white people resented my existence."

By his mid-teens, Lester decided to make a special effort to find books that would help him understand the world in which he lived. He turned his attention to books like Richard Wright's *Black Boy,* which sought to describe the anger that many blacks felt about living in a racist society. He also read novels and nonfiction works that explored the history and politics of race relations around the world. Eventually, Lester's long hours of reading gave him "the knowledge that the segregated world in which I was forced to live bounded by the white heat of hatred was not the only reality. . . . I knew this was true because the books I read ravenously, desperately, were voices from that world."

EDUCATION

A gifted student, Lester earned his high school diploma from the Nashville public school system in 1956. He then enrolled at Fisk University in Nashville. "In 1956, when I entered college, I was a chemistry major because I felt I should do something useful with my life," he remembered. "That aberration passed quickly when I received a D in freshman math. So I was faced with a decision: what to do with my life? I didn't know because there was only one thing I truly loved, and that was books. A quick perusal of the want ads convinced me, however, that no one would pay me to stay at home and read. But reading was what I loved to do above all else. . . . I followed my love and became an English major."

Over the next four years, Lester immersed himself in literature from all over the world. He excelled in his studies, and he graduated with a bachelor of arts degree (B.A.) in English in 1960. After graduating, however, he realized that he still did not know what career he should pursue. "My four years of reading came rapidly to an end, and the question of what to do with my life had to be faced again," he recalled. "So I asked again, What do you love? The answer was more fervent now: I love books. And from that all-embracing, indiscriminate love came the decision to become a writer. . . . I became a writer because I love books, and how can one live without expressing his or her love?" In an interview with the online bookseller Amazon.com, he thought back to why he became a writer. "I am not sure what led me to become a writer. There was no decision. Rather there was a growing certainty that grew from the age of 17 until I was 21 that this was what I was supposed to do with my life." First, though, before he devoted himself to writing, Lester spent several years involved in political and artistic activity.

FIRST JOBS

Activist in the Civil Rights Movement

Shortly after graduating from Fisk in 1960, Lester became an active participant in the American civil rights movement. This movement, led by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., and other black religious and community leaders, campaigned to eliminate segregation and other racist elements of American society. Its basic goal was to give blacks and other minorities the same rights and privileges that white Americans had long enjoyed.

Lester traveled extensively throughout the South during the early 1960s. He helped organize demonstrations and other events. He also became one of the movement's main photographers, taking countless rolls of film of civil rights activities in towns across the region. In 1966 he joined a civil rights group called the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC, pronounced "Snick"). In the early 1960s this organization's membership had been made up primarily of students at black colleges and universities. They joined Dr. King's Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) and other black civil rights organizations in using non-violent tactics to push civil rights programs. Around the time that Lester joined SNCC, however, it became a more confrontational and militant organization that based its activities on ideals of "black power."

In addition to his work on behalf of SNCC, Lester devoted time to a number of other interests. In 1967 he was part of a small group of antiwar Americans who traveled to North Vietnam to study the effects of U.S. air

bombing during the Vietnam War. He also became heavily involved in music, recording two albums of folksongs and serving as director of the prestigious Newport Folk Festival from 1966 to 1968. Finally, he launched his literary career with two books that addressed his experiences in the civil rights struggle. These works—*The Angry Children of Malcolm X* in 1966 and *Look Out Whitey! Black Power's Gon' Get Your Mama!* in 1968—defended black anger and militance toward American society. They also further established Lester as a public figure.

Controversial Radio Show Host

In 1968 Lester was hired to host a radio show on a public broadcasting station in New York City. He quickly became known for his outspoken views on politics, race relations, and other issues that concerned black communities. Later in the year, however, he came under fire for airing some highly questionable material. One day, he broadcast an anti-Semitic (anti-Jewish) poem written by a black teenager. Lester later said that he permitted the poem to be read over the air because he felt that it was important to expose listeners to the anger that some blacks felt toward the Jewish community. That anger was based on the charge by some blacks that Jewish business owners and communities mistreat blacks or make light of their historic suffering; many Jews and non-Jews dismiss this charge as false. A month later, two black students appeared on his show. During the broadcast, one of the teens said that "Hitler should have made more Jews into lampshades," a reference to the period in the 1940s when Hitler-led Germany murdered six million Jews in the Holocaust. Lester did not challenge the teen's outrageous remark. He later admitted that his silence was a "mistake."

> *"Growing up listening to my father and other ministers preach, to the cadences and the use of language as well as just listening to them tell stories, was training me for something. I was blessed to grow up in that environment, and it left an indelible mark. I don't know what my career as a writer would be like if I had not grown up with that in my background."*

These incidents greatly angered America's Jewish communities and infuriated many non-Jewish Americans as well. They argued that Lester's show was sending out messages of anti-Semitism and ethnic intolerance. The

storm of criticism eventually faded, however, and he continued with his radio program.

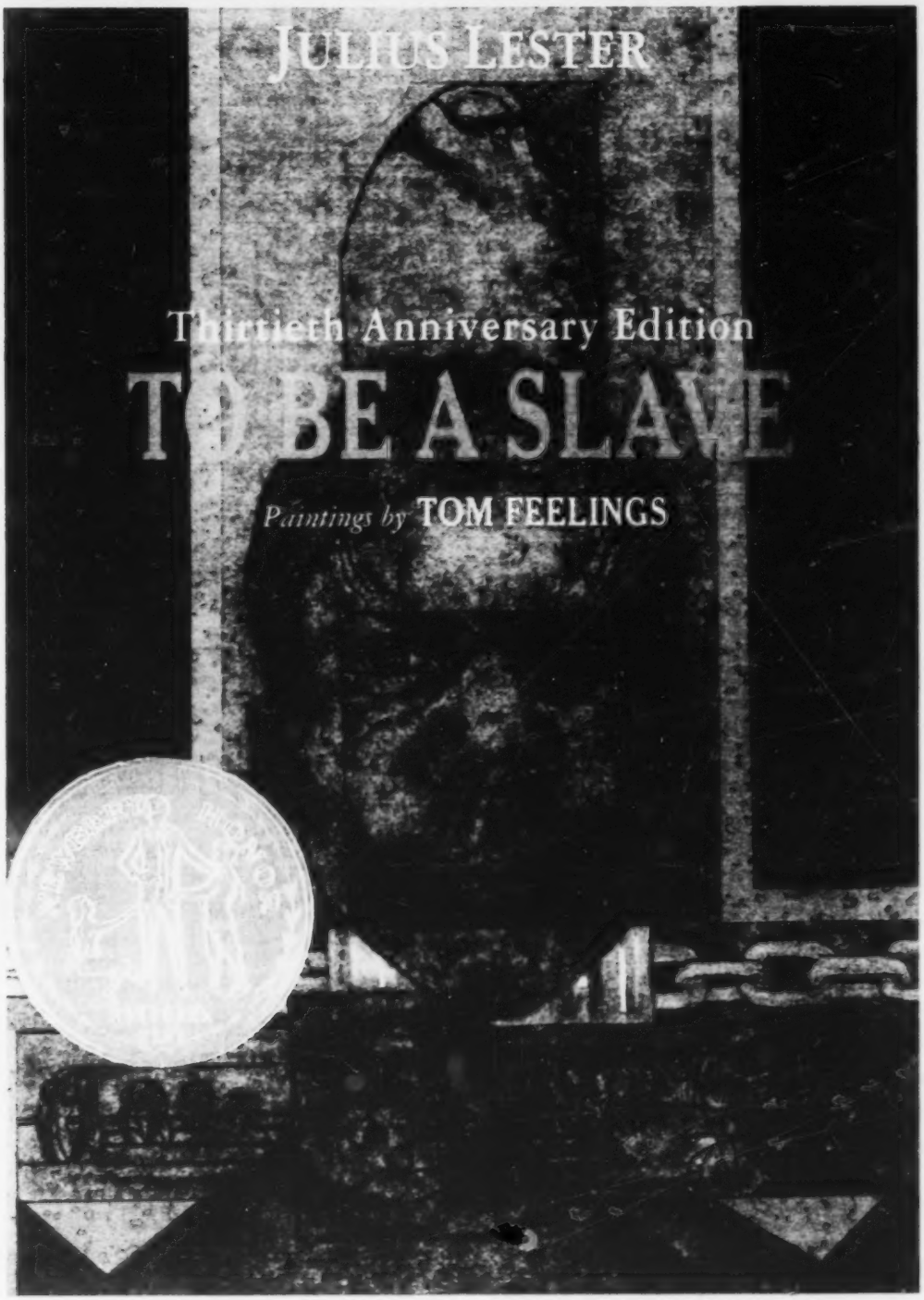
CAREER HIGHLIGHTS

During this time, though, Lester also began devoting himself to writing. Over the past 30 years, he has become renowned for his chronicles of African-American life—the story of black people since they were first brought to this country as slaves some 400 years ago. His writings include original stories and retellings of established African-American folktales, as well as nonfiction works on history and politics. In addition, he has emerged as an insightful commentator on black-Jewish relations since his conversion in the early 1980s to the Jewish religious faith. He continued to write for adults over the years, but he also began writing for younger readers as well. In fact, his literary career first began to blossom in the late 1960s, with the publication of his influential young adult book *To Be a Slave*.

> *"To be a slave. To know, despite the suffering and deprivation, that you were human, more human than he who said you were not human. To know joy, laughter, sorrow, and tears and yet be considered only the equal of a table. To be a slave was to be a human being under conditions in which that humanity was denied. They were not slaves. They were people. Their condition was slavery."*

To Be a Slave

Lester came to writing books for young readers really by accident. "I never thought of writing for children until the editor of my first book said that she thought I could write for children," he admitted. After hearing her words of encouragement, however, he began thinking about a book project that would educate students about the terrible period of American history in which slavery thrived. During his research into the subject, Lester discovered that in the 1930s, hundreds of former slaves had been interviewed about their experiences through a government initiative called the Federal Writers Project. The Federal Writers Project, or FWP, came about during the Great Depression of the 1930s, when millions of Americans lost their jobs and lived in desperate poverty. The government created public works programs to give



people jobs. One of these programs was the FWP, which sponsored the interviews with former slaves. "Here was all this incredible material that no one knew about," he recalled. "At that time I was just writing down things that struck me personally but with no firm idea of what kind of book to do.

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I just felt how fortunate we were to have the words of the people who had gone through slavery and had left a direct testimony." As he later said, "this book was one of the things I had been put on earth to do."

Lester eventually decided to use the recollections of former slaves as the foundation for *To Be a Slave*. But he supplemented these testimonials with his own comments on slavery's awful realities. "To be a slave. To be owned by another person, as a car, house, table is owned. To live as a piece of property that could be sold—a child sold from its mother, a wife from her husband. To be considered not human, but a 'thing' that plowed the fields, cut the wood, cooked the food, nursed another's child; a 'thing' whose sole function was determined by the one who owned you." In another passage, he said this: "To be a slave. To know, despite the suffering and deprivation, that you were human, more human than he who said you were not human. To know joy, laughter, sorrow, and tears and yet be considered only the equal of a table. To be a slave was to be a human being under conditions in which that humanity was denied. They were not slaves. They were people. Their condition was slavery."

"I am grateful to all those who have read **[To Be a Slave]**, *to all those who read it. History is not just facts and events. History is also a pain in the heart, and we repeat history until we are able to make another's pain in the heart our own."*

When *To Be a Slave* was published in 1968, it was considered a seminal document in African-American history. Hailed as a vital contribution to the study of the black experience in the United States, it also received special recognition as a valuable tool for teaching young people about slavery. By combining narratives from the slaves themselves with passages in his own words, Lester told the story of slavery in a powerful and dramatic way that brought the past to life for his young readers. *To Be a Slave* was designated a Newbery Honor Book and received praise from many reviewers. As Michael Cart wrote in *Booklist*, "In *To Be a Slave* . . . it was Lester's gift to those who endured that condition to restore their humanity, to remind us, by sharing their stories in their own unforgettable words, that they were, indeed, people." Years later, readers find the book just as moving and as powerful as it was when it was first published. In the introduction to a new 30th anniversary edition, Lester wrote that "I am grateful to all those who have read it, to all those who read it. History is not just facts and

events. History is also a pain in the heart, and we repeat history until we are able to make another's pain in the heart our own."

Lester followed up *To Be a Slave* with a collection of myths and legends called *Black Folktales* (1969). These slavery-era stories contained folktales from both Africa and America. In his Foreword, Lester explained why these stories are important today. "It is in stories like these that a child learns who his parents are and who he will become. . . . These stories are told here not as they were told a hundred years ago, but as I tell them now. And I tell them now only because they have meaning now." Lester called the collection "a natural outgrowth of my own background." He added that he compiled the book because he did not want to see the folktales fade away. "My own sense [was] that if the tales were to be kept alive, they had to be done in book form, and they had to be done in such a way that people could enjoy the tales and see their relevance to their own lives." *Black Folktales* proved popular with both young adult readers and critics. For example, Laura M. Zaidman wrote in *Writers of Multicultural Fiction* that "beneath these simple tales about butterflies, snakes, and devils lies the history of slavery and Reconstruction."

Respected Teacher and Writer

During the 1970s Lester's reputation as a talented and energetic scholar on black issues continued to grow. In 1971 he joined the faculty of the University of Massachusetts-Amherst as a professor in its new Afro-American Studies department. He quickly became one of the university's most popular and respected teachers. At about the same time, he left his radio show to host a television series called *Free Time*, which broadcast on PBS from 1971 to 1973.

But while Lester devoted large blocks of time to both his television show and his professorial responsibilities, he never let his writing career fade

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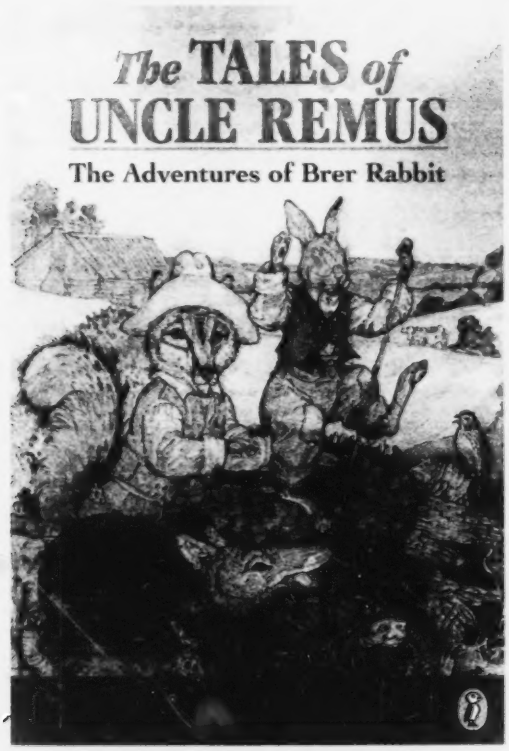

into the background. He worked as an editor on several books, including an essay collection written by black sociologist and educator W.E.B. Du Bois. This collection, called *The Seventh Son* (1971), added to Lester's reputation as a scholar of black history. In addition, he published a number of works for both adults and children on black history, folklore, and politics during the 1970s.

Occasionally, these books were interpreted in a negative light. One target for criticism was *Black Folktales*, which some faulted for its depiction of racial issues. For example, critic Zena Sutherland said in *Bulletin of the Center for Children's Books* that *Black Folktales* was "a vehicle for hostility. . . . There is not a story that concerns white people in which they are not pictured as venal or stupid or both." But many critics praised Lester's books, especially his story collections for young adults. In 1972, for example, he published *The Long Journey Home: Stories from Black History*, a collection of six stories about common people. The stories are deeply emotional and compelling, documenting some of the horrors experienced by slaves. Reviewer Rosalind Goddard voiced strong approval for the collection in the *New York Times Book Review*, giving this example of the stories' human drama. "You feel the suspense as a 17-year-old slave runs away and travels the Underground Railroad; you sicken at the holocaust as slaves in the shiphold die in their own waste; you empathize with the enraged woman who mixes sputum and ground glass into her master's food; and finally, you learn the roots of the Blues and how they kept a man spiritually free."

Lester followed that collection with *The Knee-High Man and Other Tales* (1972), a group of six animal folktales gathered from American slave lore. Critics hailed his selection of stories and his storytelling abilities, particularly his use of humor to convey important lessons. Eric and Naomi Foner used the publication of *The Knee-High Man* to praise the author's entire body of young adult books in the *New York Review of Books*. "[Lester's purpose is] not merely to impart historical information, but to teach moral and

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political lessons," they claimed. "[He provides readers with] a sense of history which will help shape their lives and politics."

For his part, Lester suggested that his folktales and stories—though they originated within black slave communities—contained messages for children of all ethnic backgrounds. "The stories speak on some level to anyone who tells or listens to them," he said. "So while the stories come out of black culture, they are not the exclusive property of black people."

Converting to Judaism

In the late 1970s and early 1980s, a bitter dispute developed between Lester and some other black intellectuals at the University of Massachusetts-Amherst and elsewhere. In 1979 he wrote an angry article on relations between the black and Jewish communities. In his essay, which was published in the *Village Voice*, Lester charged that black people were unfairly blaming Jews for all their problems and remarked that black communities needed to take more responsibility for themselves.

> *"When I retell folktales, I really feel that I have an obligation to be true to both the culture out of which the stories came and the culture as it is now. . . . People think retelling tales is easy: you have a text in front of you, and you retell the story, but you really do have to have a sense of the nuance of the culture."*

His criticisms angered other black faculty members in the university's Afro-American Studies department, which led to a division between Lester and his fellow teachers. He blamed the dispute on the black community's ongoing struggle to attain equal rights and economic opportunities in America. "There is a deep sense of despair and hopelessness in the black community," he said. "When people are feeling under siege, they feel it is important to close ranks. And that means anyone who is critical [of them] is going to be left on the outside."

Around this same period, Lester discovered that his beloved maternal grandmother had been of mixed African and Jewish ancestry. He became curious because her maiden name, Altschul, was unusual for an African-American. He learned that her father (Lester's great-grandfather), Adolph Altschul, was a German Jew who had immigrated to the South in the late 1800s and married a former slave. This information, along with his growing

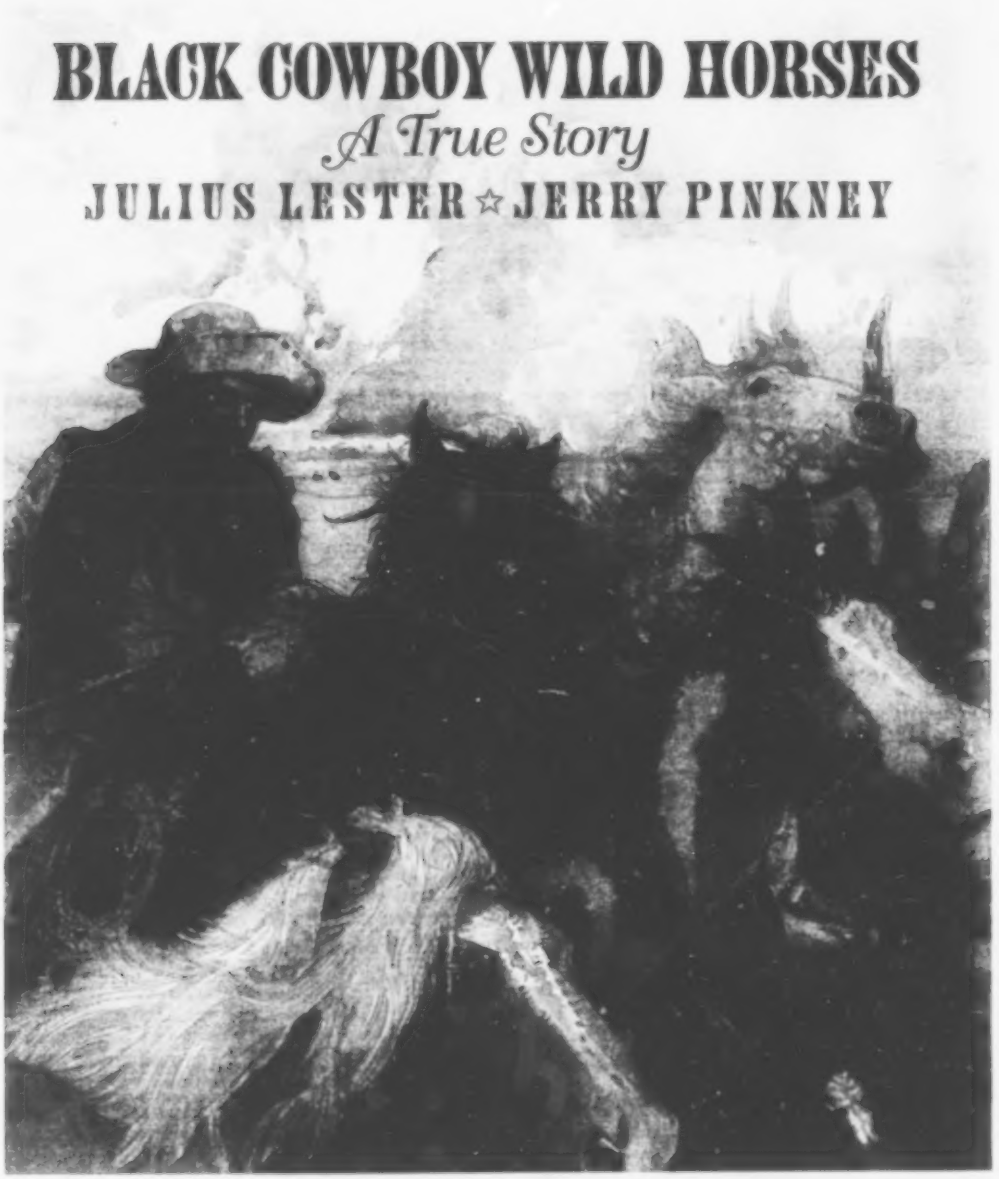
exploration of the Jewish faith, convinced him to convert to Judaism in 1982. Lester explained his decision to convert to the Jewish faith in his 1988 autobiography *Lovesong: Becoming a Jew*. "I am tired of feeling lost on the first night of Passover [a Jewish religious holiday]," he wrote. "I am tired of being jealous when I see Jews going to or coming from synagogue. I want my eyes to shine like sky as do those of my Jewish students when they return to class after having gone home for the first night of Passover. I am a Jew. I wonder if I have been always and if playing 'Kol Nidre' [a Jewish song] on the piano when I was seven was a tiny act of affirmation which I am able only now to embody. I will not be converting to Judaism. I am becoming, at long last, who I always have been. I am a Jew. I'm only sorry it has taken me 42 years to accept that."

"We all live in and move back and forth between many worlds. One of my worlds is the world of black culture. Another of my worlds is the world of Western culture; another is the world of Jewish culture, and the culture of the university, and then there's the culture of New England. We all live in multiple cultures."

Lovesong: Becoming a Jew was widely praised as an honest and sensitive portrait of self-discovery. *Partisan Review* contributor David Lehman called it a book of "conviction and passion," while *Christian Century* reviewer Douglas Stone praised the "introspective memoir" as "beautifully written." But its pages also included harsh criticisms of several prominent black leaders—including Louis Farrakhan, Jesse Jackson, and writer James Baldwin—for expressing anti-Jewish feelings or remaining silent when others made anti-Semitic remarks. "I know that black intellectuals are not morally insensitive, but there comes a time when silence becomes immoral complicity," Lester explained in the *New York Times* in 1988. These passages in *Lovesong* deepened the rift between Lester and other black intellectuals at University of Massachusetts-Amherst and elsewhere, but he never backed down from his remarks.

Retelling the Brer Rabbit Stories

In the meantime, Lester maintained his status as one of the country's leading scholars of African-American history and one of its foremost interpreters of folktales and legends for children. Beginning in the late 1980s, he turned his attention to the famous Brer Rabbit stories that had originated among black slave communities of the 18th and 19th centuries. These



tales of Brer Rabbit and other assorted animals who try to outwit one another had long been viewed as insulting to blacks because they contained negative racial stereotypes. But Lester and illustrator Jerry Pinkney retold the stories in an entertaining way that eliminated words and imagery that blacks found offensive. Their updated versions of the Brer Rabbit stories were published in *The Tales of Uncle Remus: The Adventures of Brer Rabbit* (1987) and three sequels: *More Tales of Uncle Remus* (1988), *Further Tales of Uncle Remus* (1990), and *The Last Tales of Uncle Remus* (1994). All four books were hailed by critics as valuable additions to black literature. "The tales

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never held moral messages and may appear downright cruel to some," wrote Pamela Reynolds in the *Boston Globe*. "[But] underneath the manipulation and deceit are stories of survival and intelligence, two values important for blacks living in the South before and immediately following the Civil War."

Even as Lester's writing career continued to soar, though, his relations with other members of the University of Massachusetts-Amherst's Afro-American Studies department remained strained. In 1988, the other instructors in the department forced him to transfer, explaining that "he is no longer part of the black community here." He moved to the university's Near Eastern and Judaic Studies department, where he taught courses on the relationships between Jewish and black oppression in history and a wide range of other subjects. Lester's expulsion from his department generated a lot of controversy. Many felt that he was forced to transfer just because he disagreed with the other professors, which was seen as a blow to academic freedom.

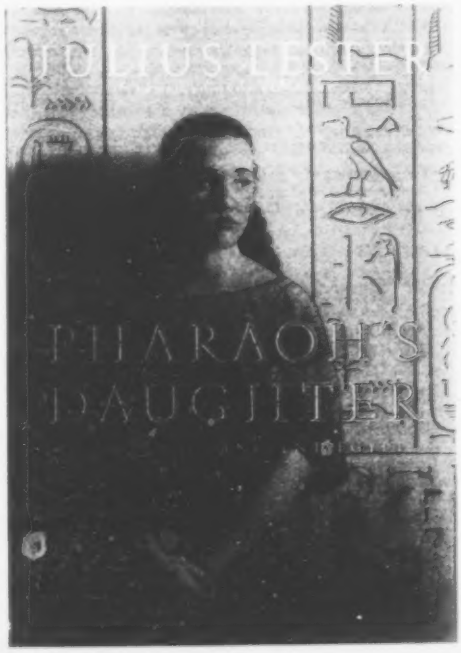
Recent Writings for Young People

Lester continued to divide his time between teaching and writing during the 1990s. His literary efforts of this period include nonfiction, novels, and folktales for young readers. "Children's literature is the one place where you can tell a story," he said. "Just tell a story, and have it received as narrative without any literary garbage. . . . I have found writing for children of all ages more rewarding than writing for adults, primarily because I like the audience and the responses I get from children."

Lester has recently published several new nonfiction titles for young readers. *From Slave Ship to Freedom Road* (1998) came about after he saw a group of oil paintings by artist Rod Brown. These paintings tell the history of slavery, from the slave ships of the Middle Passage to post-Civil War emancipation. Lester responded so strongly to Brown's work that they cre-

ated a book together, comprised of reproductions of the paintings accompanied by Lester's explanations. In the prologue, Lester said he was "Begging, pleading, imploring you not to be passive, but to invest soul and imagine yourself into the images." He created an interactive text, which draws readers in by asking them questions and encouraging them to imagine themselves in different scenarios. The book has been widely praised. Another recent nonfiction work was *Black Cowboy, Wild Horses: A True Story* (1998). In this pictorial biography, illustrated by Jerry Pinkney, Lester tells the story of cowboy Bob Lemmons, a former slave with no education who was a talented cowboy. He had an uncanny ability to track wild mustangs and to round up a herd of wild horses alone.

Lester has also recently published a couple of noted novels for young adults. His novel *Othello* (1995) is a sophistical retelling of the drama by William Shakespeare. The book follows the original story line, with some significant changes: the story is transplanted to Elizabethan England and reworked to make both Iago and Emily into Africans like Othello. This provocative retelling updates it for the contemporary audience and brings forward the work's questions about perceptions, race, and the nature of love and friendship. Praised for a prose style that skillfully blends Lester's own words with Shakespeare's, the book provides a comfortable bridge for readers who are unfamiliar with the play or uneasy with Shakespeare's language. Lester's most recent novel for young adults is *Pharaoh's Daughter* (2000). In this novel he follows the Jewish tradition of "Midrash," a way of exploring sacred texts by using the imagination. Combining details from the culture of ancient Egypt and the Biblical story of Exodus, Lester writes about the early life of Moses, whom he calls Mosis, and the spiritual conflict that he undergoes. "The magic of the story," according to *Kirkus Reviews*, "lies in how it confronts eternal questions: What do I believe? What is Holy? Who am I and whom do I choose to be?"



Lester has also continued to create reworkings of folktales and legends from earlier eras. In 1990, for example, he published *How Many Spots Does a Leopard Have?* a story collection that drew from both African and Jewish folktale traditions. Critics

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Lester hopes his books will be enjoyed by young readers of all ethnic and social backgrounds. "Why would I not want to share something of my culture with somebody else? Why would I be so mean as not to want to share something that I think is beautiful, which brings me joy, which gives me a sense of satisfaction—why would I want to keep that from somebody."

praised the book for its graceful language, its lively stories, and its embrace of both cultures. In 1994 Lester teamed up again with illustrator Jerry Pinkney to tell the story of John Henry, a mythical railroad worker of the 19th century who is a famous African-American folk hero. *Booklist* magazine called *John Henry* "a tall tale and heroic myth, a celebration of the human spirit. . . . The story is told with rhythm and wit, humor, and exaggeration, and with a heart catching immediacy that connects the human and the natural world." In 1996, meanwhile, Lester and Pinkney updated the story of Little Black Sambo. Generations earlier, this story of a little black boy's adventures had been very popular with white and black audiences alike. But as the civil rights movement gained strength in America, the story's offensive stereotyped depictions of black people made it unpopular. Lester and Pinkney reworked the story, removing the offensive language and illustrations but keeping the plot and adventurous spirit of the original. The final result was *Sam and the Tigers*, an entertaining tale of a boy who outwits some tigers, then gets treated to pancakes with tiger butter for supper.

Lester's love for folktales remains strong, even though he says that updating the stories is more difficult than people think. "In many ways, retelling folktales—as I've done for almost 25 years now—has been more challenging than writing fiction," he claimed. "When I retell folktales, I really feel that I have an obligation to be true to both the culture out of which the stories came and the culture as it is now. . . . People think retelling tales is easy: you have a text in front of you, and you retell the story, but you really do have to have a sense of the nuance of the culture. Growing up listening to my father and other ministers preach, to the cadences and the use of language as well as just listening to them tell stories, was training me for something. I was blessed to grow up in that environment, and it left an indelible mark. I don't know what my career as a writer would be like if I had not grown up with that in my background."

Exploring His Black and Jewish Heritage

Lester's lifelong interest in exploring his social and ethnic roots has shown no sign of slowing, either. In the late 1990s, for example, he published *What a Truly Cool World* (1997) and *When the Beginning Began* (1999), which retell black and Jewish legends of creation. These collections interpret the creation stories from the Old Testament through a combination of two traditions: the humor of African-American storytelling and the imaginative inquiry of the Jewish custom of Biblical interpretation. The result is a reverent, witty, and entertaining approach to some beloved old stories. "We all live in and move back and forth between many worlds," Lester explained. "One of my worlds is the world of black culture. Another of my worlds is the world of Western culture; another is the world of Jewish culture, and the culture of the university, and then there's the culture of New England. We all live in multiple cultures."

By reading his books, Lester hopes, black and Jewish children will gain a greater understanding of their heritage. But he also hopes his books will be enjoyed by young readers of all ethnic and social backgrounds. "Why would I not want to share something of my culture with somebody else?" he said. "Why would I be so mean as not to want to share something that I think is beautiful, which brings me joy, which gives me a sense of satisfaction—why would I want to keep that from somebody. Clearly, in folktales, you experience something of the essence of what it is to be human. It's shortsighted and ultimately mean spirited to try to limit that experience to a single culture or group. . . . I honestly do not care what your culture is or what your skin color is. If these stories move you, if you love these stories, than please share what you love. That's what I think storytelling is, sharing what I love."

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MARRIAGE AND FAMILY

Lester has been married several times. His first wife was Joan Steinau; they had two children, Jody and Malcolm.

He later married Alida Carolyn Fechner; she had a daughter, Elena, and they had a son together, David. More recently he married Milan Sabatini, and they have one child, Lian.

HOBBIES AND OTHER INTERESTS

Lester's hobbies include stamp collecting and hiking. "My life is very full. I teach, I write, I do a lot of traveling and lecturing. The older I get there seems to be more things that I want to do. My life is really quite wonderful."

WRITINGS

Nonfiction for Young Adults

To Be a Slave, 1968
From Slave Ship to Freedom Road, 1998
Black Cowboy, Wild Horses: A True Story, 1998

Fiction for Young Adults

The Long Journey Home: Stories from Black History, 1972
Two Love Stories, 1972
This Strange New Feeling, 1982
Othello: A Novel, 1995
Pharaoh's Daughter: A Novel of Ancient Egypt, 2000

Folklore for Young Adults

Black Folktales, 1969
The Knee-High Man and Other Tales, 1972
The Tales of Uncle Remus: The Adventures of Brer Rabbit, 1987
More Tales of Uncle Remus: The Further Adventures of Brer Rabbit, His Friends, Enemies, and Others, 1988
Further Tales of Uncle Remus: The Misadventures of Brer Rabbit, Brer Fox, Brer Wolf, the Doodang, and Other Creatures, 1990
How Many Spots Does a Leopard Have? and Other Tales, 1990
The Last Tales of Uncle Remus, 1994
John Henry, 1994
The Man Who Knew Too Much: A Moral Tale from the Baila of Zambia, 1994
Sam and the Tigers: A New Telling of Little Black Sambo, 1996
What a Truly Cool World, 1997
Uncle Remus: The Complete Tales, 1999
When the Beginning Began: Stories about God, the Creatures, and Us, 1999

Other

The 12-String Guitar as Played by Leadbelly: An Instructional Manual, 1965 (with Pete Seeger)
The Angry Children of Malcolm X, 1966
The Mud of Vietnam: Photographs and Poems, 1967
Look Out Whitey! Black Power's Gon' Get Your Mama! 1968
Ain't No Ambulances for No Nigguhs Tonight, 1969 (editor)
The Seventh Son: The Thoughts and Writings of W.E.B. Du Bois, 2 vols., 1971 (editor)
All Is Well: An Autobiography, 1976
Do Lord Remember Me, 1985 (novel)
Lovesong: Becoming a Jew, 1988
Falling Pieces of the Broken Sky, 1990
And All Our Wounds Forgiven, 1994
The Autobiography of God, 1995

HONORS AND AWARDS

Notable Book (American Library Association): 1969, for *To Be a Slave;* 1988, for *Tales of Uncle Remus;* 1995, for *John Henry*
Nancy Bloch Award: 1969, for *To Be a Slave*
Lewis Carroll Shelf Award: 1970, for *To Be a Slave;* 1972, for *The Long Journey Home;* 1973, for *The Knee-High Man*
Distinguished Teacher's Award: 1983-84
Faculty Fellowship Award for Distinguished Research and Scholarship: 1985
National Professor of the Year (Council for Advancement and Support of Education): 1985, Silver Medal Award; 1986, Gold Medal Award
Boston Globe-Horn Book Award: 1995, for *John Henry*
Notable Children's Book in the Field of Social Studies: 1995, for *John Henry;* 1999, for *From Slave Ship to Freedom Road*
Best Children's Book of the Year (*Parents Magazine*): 1995, for *John Henry*
Best Book for Young Adults (American Library Association): 1996, for *Othello;* 1999, for *From Slave Ship to Freedom Road*
Quick Pick for Reluctant Young Readers (American Library Association):1996, for *Othello*

FURTHER READING

Books

Authors and Artists for Young Adults, Vol. 12, 1994
Contemporary Authors New Revision Series, Vol. 43, 1994

90

Contemporary Black Biography, Vol. 9, 1995
de Montreville, Doris, and Elizabeth D. Crawford, eds. *Fourth Book of Junior Authors and Illustrators,* 1978
Hoffman, Miriam, and Eva Samuels. *Authors and Illustrators of Children's Books: Writings on Their Lives and Works,* 1972
Kutzer, M. Daphne, ed. *Writers of Multicultural Fiction for Young Adults,* 1996
Lester, Julius. *All Is Well,* 1976
Lester, Julius. *Lovesong: Becoming a Jew,* 1988
McElmeel, Sharron L. *Bookpeople: A Multicultural Album,* 1992
St. James Guide to Young Adult Writers, 1999
Silvey, Anita, ed. *Children's Books and Their Creators,* 1995
Something About the Author, Vol. 74, 1993
Who's Who in America, 2000

Periodicals

Booklist, Feb. 15, 1995, p.1090; Feb. 15, 1999, p.1052
Boston Globe, Aug. 20, 1987, p.B33; July 25, 1988, Metro Section, p.1
Change, July 1994, p.43
Commentary, Aug. 1996, p.63
Commonweal, Mar. 25, 1988, p.167
Essence, Aug. 1989, p.98; July 1991, p.100
Horn Book, Apr. 1984, p.161; Jan. 1996, p.28
Los Angeles Times, July 10, 1988, p.1 (View)
New Republic, June 27, 1988, p.9
New York Times, Oct. 11, 1972, p.41; May 29, 1988, Section 1, p.22; June 10, 1988, p.A17; July 12, 1988, p.A25
New York Times Book Review, May 24, 1970, Part 2, p.1
Publishers Weekly, Feb. 23, 1970, p.86; Feb. 12, 1988, p.67
Washington Post, July 12, 1994, p.E1

ADDRESS

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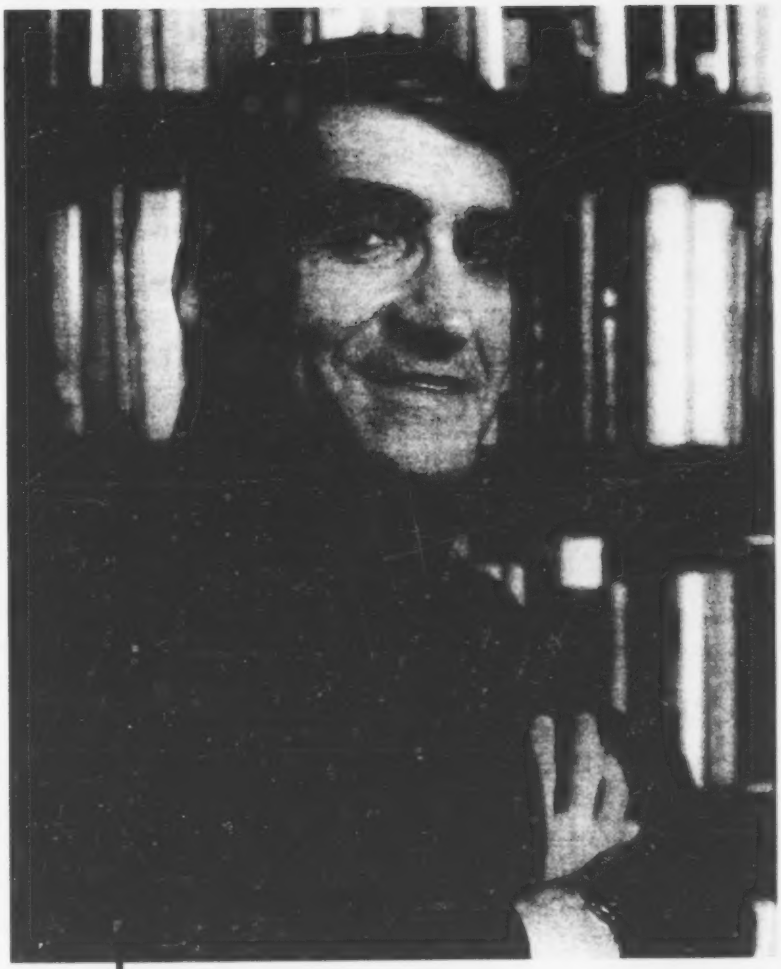
WORLD WIDE WEB SITES

http://www.penguinputnam.com/catalog/yreader/authors/2838_biography.html
http://www.childrenslit.com/f_lester.html



Robert Pinsky 1940-

American Poet, Translator, and Literary Critic
Poet Laureate of the United States

BIRTH

Robert Pinsky was born on October 20, 1940, in Long Branch, New Jersey, into a family of mixed Jewish and Italian heritage. His parents were Milford Simon Pinsky, an optician, and Sylvia (Eisenberg) Pinsky. He was an only child.

YOUTH

Pinsky spent his childhood in Long Branch, a former resort town that had been home to his family for several genera-

tions. Pinsky enjoyed growing up in Long Branch, in part because his family was well-known in the community. His grandfather, a former boxer, owned a popular local tavern, and his parents were known around the neighborhood as a bright and energetic couple. "Long Branch was a very interesting town," recalled Pinsky. "It had a small-town atmosphere of which my family was very much a part."

In the early 20th century, Long Branch had been a favorite summer vacation destination for wealthy businessmen and politicians. President Woodrow Wilson had even maintained a summer home in the community. By the time Pinsky was born, the town's popularity had faded. But the community still had many charms. "There was a beautiful, expansive Italian culture of food, music, and communal life," he remembered. In addition, he describes his childhood town as a place "where a lot of families and people knew each other very well, a place with a boardwalk, an ocean, a racetrack, and a downtown where you could feel like a prince. That is a good background for a writer. It gives you a feeling of fitting into the world, a world with distinct contours and interestingly rich fabric and a history that was real."

Pinsky describes his childhood town as a place "where a lot of families and people knew each other very well, a place with a boardwalk, an ocean, a racetrack, and a downtown where you could feel like a prince. That is a good background for a writer. It gives you a feeling of fitting into the world, a world with distinct contours and interestingly rich fabric and a history that was real."

Pinsky was an active youngster who played sandlot baseball and countless other games with children around the neighborhood. But he also developed a strong interest in music, art, and other creative pursuits at an early age. "I was the sort of kid who had fantasies of being an artist of one kind or another," said Pinsky. "If I saw a Fred Astaire movie, I came out [of the theater] trying to dance. I had fantasies of designing buildings or cars or lamps or domestic objects. I had fantasies of being a painter, an actor, and a musician."

Over time, Pinsky also became an avid reader. He was particularly drawn to the tales of Mark Twain, Charles Dickens, and Lewis Carroll. "The Alice in Wonderland books were incredibly important to me," he remembered.

"As a child, I read them over and over again." His growing interest in literature led him to spend hours exploring the family dictionary, teaching himself new words and concepts.

By his junior year of high school, Pinsky's fascination with words and their meanings had steered him into the world of poetry. "My interest in poetry began before I went to college," he said. "I was 17 when I discovered [William Butler] Yeats. . . . [The poem 'Sailing to Byzantium'] just blew my mind. I typed it up and put it on the wall near where I ate breakfast. I began to take pleasure in memorizing and reciting poems, and soon afterward discovered Walt Whitman, William Carlos Williams, Allen Ginsberg."

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Still, Pinsky's greatest teenage passion was for music. "I spent most of my adolescence and early manhood thinking about being a jazz musician and composer," he recalled. "I played tenor saxophone, sort of the glamor instrument of that period. I had a lot of daydreams about the marvelous things I would do as a musician, and I did play professionally for a few years when I was a kid. . . . I think my first experience of making art was playing horn at some high school dance. I remember looking at the people dancing and that was miraculous to me."

EDUCATION

Pinsky attended elementary and high school in Long Branch, where he gained a reputation as a bright but restless student. Bored with many of his classes, he earned only average grades. Nonetheless, he enrolled in New Jersey's Rutgers University in 1958 after earning his high school diploma.

Once Pinsky arrived at Rutgers, he became friends with a loose group of young writers who were dedicated to developing their literary talents. Their enthusiasm for literature helped convince Pinsky to explore his own natural gift for working with language. At the same time, he began to reconsider his longtime dream of building a musical career. "About the time I went

away from Long Branch to college, I gradually started realizing I wasn't that good as a musician," explained Pinsky. "Very quickly, fantasies of being a great musician changed to fantasies of being a great poet."

In 1962, Pinsky graduated from Rutgers with a bachelor's degree. He then moved to California, where he continued his education at Stanford University. During his stay at Stanford, Pinsky worked hard to hone his talent as a poet. "You begin by imitating what you like," he recalled. "[But] as I wrote more poems and read a wider variety of poets, I discovered ways to write which were less self-conscious, less old-fashioned." He earned his Ph.D. from Stanford in 1966.

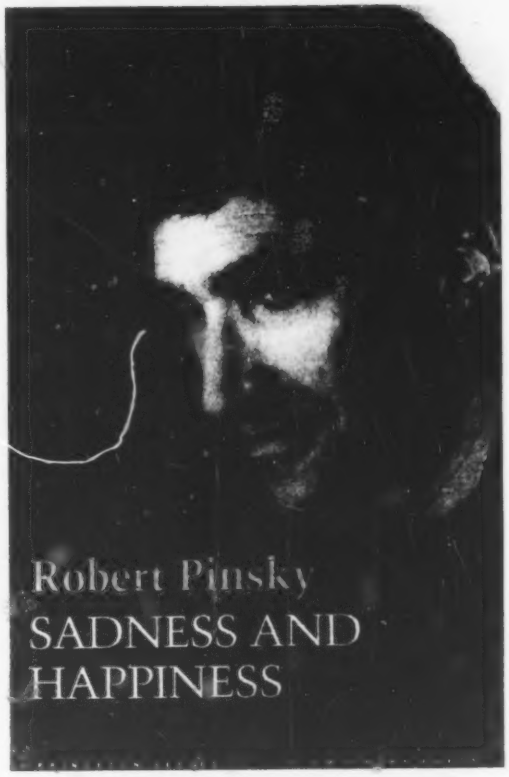
"I spent most of my adolescence and early manhood thinking about being a jazz musician and composer. . . . About the time I went away from Long Branch to college, I gradually started realizing I wasn't that good as a musician," explained Pinsky. "Very quickly, fantasies of being a great musician changed to fantasies of being a great poet."

CAREER HIGHLIGHTS

During the course of his career, Pinsky has established himself as a leading figure in several literary fields. During the 1970s and 1980s, he built a distinguished career as a poetry critic and professor of English and creative writing. He also emerged as one of America's finest and most sensitive translators in the mid-1990s, when his translation of Dante's classic poem *Inferno* became a bestseller. But it is for his poetry that Pinsky is best known. During the past three decades he has published several collections of poetry, each of which has been widely praised. This body of poetic work, combined with his reputation as an accomplished critic and translator, resulted in his selection as Poet Laureate of the United States in 1997.

Attracting Notice as a Poet and Critic

After graduating from Stanford University in 1966, Pinsky entered the world of teaching. He accepted his first faculty position at the University of Chicago, where he served as an assistant professor in the humanities. In 1968 he left Chicago for Wellesley College in Massachusetts. He spent the next 12 years at Wellesley as an associate professor of English, building a reputation as one of the nation's most promising poets and critics.



Pinsky's first collection of poetry, titled *Sadness and Happiness,* was published in 1975. These poems—which emphasized clear, direct language and addressed a wide range of subjects—received a warm reception from critics and readers. "The feeling that . . . American poetry has entered a new era of confidence is borne out by *Sadness and Happiness,*" said *Yale Review* contributor Louis Martz, who added that Pinsky was an "exhilarating new poet."

Three years later, Pinsky published his first book of poetry criticism. This work, called *The Situation of Poetry: Contemporary Poetry and Its Traditions,* detailed the author's theories about the nature of poetry. Pinsky discussed the language used in contemporary poetry and defended his belief that poetry should act as "a bridge between the worldly and the spiritual."

The Situation of Poetry also received very strong reviews upon its release. "The mind at work in [the book] is lively, fresh and critical without being obsessed by the rigor of criticism," remarked Denis Donoghue in the *New York Times Book Review.* Combined with his earlier book of poetry, *The Situation of Poetry* established Pinsky as one of America's fine young literary voices. "Robert Pinsky belongs to that rarest category of talent, a poet-critic," said poet Robert Lowell.

An Explanation of America

In 1978 Pinsky was named poetry editor at *New Republic* magazine. He held the position for the next eight years, even as his career as a university professor continued to blossom. In 1980 he departed Wellesley for a faculty position in the English department at the University of California at Berkeley. Eight years later, he returned east to accept a professorship of English and creative writing at Boston University, a position he still holds.

But while Pinsky's career as an instructor was rewarding, it was his continued growth as a poet and critic that drew national attention. In 1979 he

published *An Explanation of America,* an examination of U.S. history presented in verse form. This book-length poem was praised both for its insights into American history and its lyrical language. It received the Saxifrage Prize as the year's best volume of poetry published by a small or university press. For his part, Pinsky expressed the hope that readers would approach *An Explanation of America* as if it were "somewhat like a big house with a lot of interesting rooms in it. The reader might wander through and choose one room rather than another, start in the middle and read a section, maybe a favorite section, and discover a new section. . . . That would be the ambition of someone writing a long poem. At the same time, the poet would like to think that every reader would read it through from beginning to end at least once sometime in the relationship with the poem."

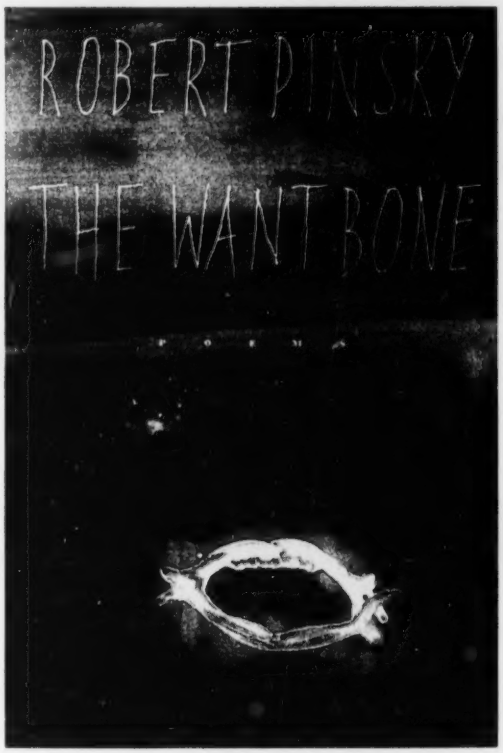
Pinsky says that while he was working on his translation of Dante's Inferno, *"It just gripped me, like a child with a new video game. I literally couldn't stop working on it. . . . We have pillowcases stained with ink where my wife took the pen out of my hand at night."*

In 1984 Pinsky published another highly regarded book of poetry, *History of My Heart.* In this collection, the author revealed a more personal side to his poetry. He used elements of his own life, such as his Long Branch childhood, to explore themes of both national and individual identity. In the title poem, for example, *Georgia Review* contributor Stephen Corey wrote that "Pinsky says that 'happiness needs a setting,' and nearly all of the poem is devoted to providing this—from his mother's early stories of life before his birth, on up through his own memories of infancy, childhood, and adolescence." *New Republic* contributor J.D. McClatchy, meanwhile, called the book "Pinsky's breakthrough" and stated that "it will come to be seen as one of the best books of the past decade."

Pinsky followed up *History of My Heart* with a second volume of poetry criticism, called *Poetry and the World.* This 1988 collection of essays included discussions of a wide range of subjects, from personal subjects like his own childhood to broader issues in politics, religion, and literature.

The Want Bone

In 1990 Pinsky published *The Want Bone,* another collection of poems that helped secure his reputation as one of America's finest poets. In many of



these poems, Pinsky explored themes of personal growth and talked about the relationships between individuals and larger communities. "His work is motivated by a strong sense of the attractiveness of certain ranges of ordinary, often middle-class, American experience," observed critic Robert von Hallberg.

Other poems in the collection, meanwhile, examined the emotional and symbolic importance of certain everyday objects. These poems reflect Pinsky's stated belief that "the challenge for the writer is to take what does not seem automatically part of the realm of art and to make art out of it." In Pinsky's poem "The Shirt," for example, the poet details important elements of American history by tracking a seemingly ordinary shirt as it passes through various hands over the years. "By the end of the poem," wrote McClatchy, "the plain sportshirt has become a mythological shirt of flame, a history laid on the poet's back."

Achieving Renown as a Translator

In May 1993 Pinsky and a number of other poets were asked to participate in a reading of the poem *Inferno* in New York City. The poem, the first of three parts of a larger work known as *The Divine Comedy*, is a famous masterpiece of literature. It was written by Italian poet Dante Alighieri in the early 14th century.

Pinsky gladly accepted the offer, and he began the process of translating the section that he was going to read from its original Italian into English. As he dove into the project, he realized that the *Inferno*'s reputation as a very challenging work to translate was justified. The poem has a very difficult and complex rhyme scheme. In addition, the task of making a translation that preserved the original poem's imagery and meaning was very demanding. Nonetheless, Pinsky became fascinated by the *Inferno* as he worked on the project. "It just gripped me, like a child with a new video game. I literally couldn't stop working on it," he recalled. Eventually, he de-

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cided to attempt a translation of the entire work. He devoted large blocks of time to the project over the next several months, often translating until late into the night. "We have pillowcases stained with ink where my wife took the pen out of my hand at night," he admitted.

Pinsky's translation of the *Inferno* was published in 1994. It caused an immediate sensation in the literary world, where it was viewed as one of the best translations of Dante's works ever produced (more than 50 translations of the *Inferno* alone have been published over the years).

"His skill and power as poet inform every line of this splendid translation," said John Ahern in the *New York Times Book Review.* Critic Edward Hirsch offered praise as well, writing in the *New Yorker* that the translation "maintains the original's episodic and narrative velocity while mirroring its formal shape and character." Pinsky's translation even appeared on bestseller lists after being selected for inclusion in the Book of the Month Club.

Named Poet Laureate

In 1996, Pinsky published another collection of poetry called *The Figured Wheel.* This work combined his four previous books of poetry with a number of new poems. Critics and poetry lovers welcomed it as a fine overview of the author's distinguished career. *New York Times* reviewer Katha Pollitt, for example, called *The Figured Wheel* an "extraordinarily accomplished and beautiful" book. "What makes Mr. Pinsky such a rewarding and exciting writer is the sense he gives, in the very shape and structure of his poems, of getting at the depths of human experience," she added.

Pinsky's reputation as one of America's finest contemporary poets was solidified in March 1997, when he was named by the Librarian of Congress to be the 39th poet laureate of the United States. To be named "poet laureate" of the United States is a tremendous honor. The position has few duties, but has enormous prestige. Indeed, the poet who holds the post is regard-

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ed as America's official poet for the length of his or her term. The position, first created in 1937, is only one year long, but many laureates have been reappointed for a second term over the years. Not surprisingly, reaction to Pinsky's selection was very favorable. "Among the many writers who have come of age [in this era], none have succeeded more completely as poet, critic, and translator than Robert Pinsky," stated the *Nation*.

Pinsky was honored to be selected for the post. "The Library of Congress is the greatest house of memory in the world," he said. "There is more human striving recorded and cataloged in this institution than there has ever been anywhere. It is appropriate for a poet to be attached to a place of memory because poetry is an ancient way of enhancing memory, a means that predates writing."

When Pinsky formally took the post of poet laureate in October 1997, he approached it with energy and enthusiasm. But he did not abandon his other responsibilities and projects at this time. He continued to teach, and in 1998 he published another book of poetry criticism called *The Sounds of Poetry*. He also accepted a position as poetry editor for *Slate*, an Internet magazine, during this period.

The Favorite Poem Project

Pinsky wanted to make sure that he made his mark during his term as poet laureate. With this in mind he developed an idea for a project, the Favorite Poem Project, that would document America's continued appreciation for great works of poetry. "The goal of the Favorite Poem Project is to make an audio and video archive of maybe a thousand Americans of all kinds, with each person saying aloud a poem the person loves," Pinsky explained. The poems would not be works that the people themselves had written. Instead, they would be asked to select poems written by others that have had an impact on how they see the world. According to Pinsky, the project is intended to "create a record of what Americans think of poetry, how they look, and

"The goal of the Favorite Poem Project is to make an audio and video archive of maybe a thousand Americans of all kinds, with each person saying aloud a poem the person loves. . . . I want [the Favorite Poem Project] to be a record of the life of poetry in the country outside of poetry's professional world. I've already gotten enough evidence to know that that life is considerable and impressive."

what they do with their voices at the end of the 20th century. It [will] call attention to how much love of poetry there is in this country right now, and I hope it [will] also encourage curricular recognition of this love."

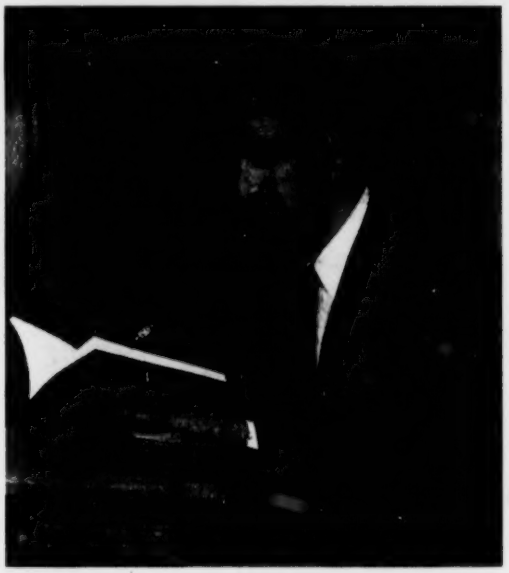
When Pinsky unveiled his Favorite Poem Project, it received an enthusiastic reception from arts groups. Organizations like the Library of Congress, the New England Foundation for the Arts, the National Foundation for the Arts, and Boston University all volunteered funds to carry out the project. Significantly, it also was warmly embraced by poetry lovers all across America. Pinsky knew that their reaction was the key to the project's success. After all, he was relying on their involvement and contributions to make his Favorite Poem Project a reality.

"To see many Americans of various ages, accents, and professions each saying a poem aloud clarifies the power of poetry and enhances a communal spirit. To some degree, it helps remind us of who we are."

In 1998 Pinsky was appointed to a second term as poet laureate. During this time, he continued to develop his poetry project. He asked Americans from all over the country to tell him about their favorite poems and why those poems had special meaning for them. He then began the process of selecting people for inclusion in the project. Those who were chosen were recorded reciting their favorite poem on video or sound recordings, then explaining why they value those verses. An Internet web site (http://www.favoritepoem.org) features videos and sound recordings from the project. A selection of the poems was published in 1999 in *Americans' Favorite Poems: The Favorite Poem Project Anthology*, edited by Pinsky and Maggie Dietz. This collection includes selected poems introduced by moving comments from the people who selected them—a broad mix of people of all ages and from all walks of life, including a social worker, a farmer, a nurse, a truck driver, a librarian, and a judge.

In 1999, Pinsky became the first person ever appointed to a third term as poet laureate of the United States. He hopes that the ongoing Favorite Poem Project will illustrate that the American people still have a great love for poetry. "I want it to be a record of the life of poetry in the country outside of poetry's professional world," he said. "I've already gotten enough evidence to know that that life is considerable and impressive." In addition, he wants the project to convey the shared experiences and dreams of the American peo-

ple, whatever their differences may be. "To see many Americans of various ages, accents, and professions each saying a poem aloud clarifies the power of poetry and enhances a communal spirit," he claimed. "To some degree, it helps remind us of who we are." Pinsky expects that the final form of the Favorite Poem Project will include 1,000 audio and 200 video recordings of poetry readings. It will be delivered to the Library of Congress in April 2000, which is both National Poetry Month and the 200th anniversary of the Library's opening.



Pinsky reads from An Explanation of America *during a 1997 lecture at the Library of Congress in Washington, D.C.*

Recent Work

In addition to his duties as poet laureate and as creator of the Favorite Poem Project, Pinsky has also continued with his own writing. His most recent collection of poetry is *Jersey Rain* (2000). This work gathers together poems that have previously appeared in various literary publications. Many of these poems, written on a wide variety of topics, mark a turning point for Pinsky. He gazes back to his earlier life with lyrical meditations on the past, occasionally revealing a wistful nostalgia for what's gone. Writing in *Booklist*, reviewer Donna Seaman called these new impassioned and personal poems "reasoned, elegant, seemingly detached, yet committed, obsessed, even haunted. . . . Life changes shape and intent in Pinsky's poems, like the gods and goddesses of old, and his chronicling of its metamorphoses is grace incarnate."

MARRIAGE AND FAMILY

Pinsky married Ellen Jane Bailey, a clinical psychologist, on December 30, 1961. They live in the Boston area. Pinsky and his wife have three adult daughters, Nicole, Caroline Rose, and Elizabeth.

HOBBIES AND OTHER INTERESTS

Pinsky's love for music remains very strong. An enthusiastic jazz buff, he continues to play the saxophone on a regular basis. In fact, he views the

arts of music making and poetry as similar in many ways. "You don't need a lot of expensive equipment or technology for [poetry]," he said. "All you need is a human body with a voice inside it, and an imagination. The other thing about poetry is that there's not a lot of money in it. That can be beautiful, too. Poets remind me in some ways of jazz musicians—people do it because they love the art, they're just crazy about it."

Pinsky's childhood love for baseball remains intact as well. In fact, he is well-known among his friends for his dedication to the Boston Red Sox.

WRITINGS

Poetry

Sadness and Happiness, 1975
An Explanation of America, 1979
History of My Heart, 1984
The Separate Notebooks, Czeslaw Milosz, 1984 (translator with Robert Hass)
The Want Bone, 1990
The Inferno of Dante: A New Verse Translation, 1994 (translator)
The Figured Wheel: New and Collected Poems, 1966-1996, 1996
Jersey Rain, 2000

Criticism

The Situation of Poetry: Contemporary Poetry and Its Traditions, 1976
Poetry and the World, 1988
The Sounds of Poetry: A Brief Guide, 1998
The Handbook of Heartbreak, 1998

Pinsky's work has also appeared in numerous literary magazines and anthologies.

HONORS AND AWARDS

Wallace Stegner Fellowship (Stanford University): 1965
Oscar Blumenthal Prize (*Poetry* magazine): 1978
American Academy of Arts and Letters Award: 1979
Saxifrage Prize: 1980
Guggenheim Fellowship: 1980
William Carlos Williams Prize: 1984
Los Angeles Times Book Review Award: 1995, for *The Inferno of Dante*
Howard Morton Landon Prize (Academy of American Poets): 1995, for *The Inferno of Dante*
Lenore Marshall Prize: 1996, for *The Figured Wheel*
Poet Laureate of the United States: 1997-2000

FURTHER READING

Books

Contemporary Authors, New Revision Series, Vol. 58, 1997
Moyers, Bill. *Fooling with Words: A Celebration of Poets and Their Craft,* 1999
Who's Who in America, 2000

Periodicals

Christian Science Monitor, Apr. 21, 1998, p.B1/B8
Contemporary Literature, Spring 1984, p.1
Current Biography 1999
Hudson Review, Spring 1980, p.131
Life, Oct. 1998, p.114
Nation, Jan. 26, 1980, p.86
New Republic, Sep. 24, 1990, p.46
New York Times, Mar. 28, 1997, p.C3; Mar. 17, 1998, p.A18; June 29, 1998, p.A17; Apr. 27, 1999, p.B8
New York Times Book Review, July 23, 1989, p.19; Sep. 25, 1994, p.15; Jan. 1, 1995, p.3
New Yorker, Jan. 23, 1995, p.87
Paris Review, Fall 1997, p.181
Poetry, Oct. 1990, p.39
Progressive, May 1999, p.35
Time for Kids, Apr. 11, 1997, p.8; Oct. 24, 1997, p.8
TriQuarterly, Winter 1994/1995, p.21
Utne Reader, Sep.-Oct.1998, p.98
Washington Post, Mar. 28, 1997, p.C1
Writer, Nov. 1999, p.18

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WORLD WIDE WEB SITES

http://www.poets.org/lit/poet/rpinsfst.htm
http://metalab.unc.edu/ipa/pinsky/
http://www.whitehouse.gov/Initiatives/Millennium/pinsky.html
http://www.bu.edu/favoritepoem/
http://www.favoritepoem.org

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Todd Strasser 1950-

American Author of Books for Middle-Grade Readers and Young Adults
Author of More Than 130 Books, Including the *Help! I'm Trapped* Series

BIRTH

Todd Strasser was born in New York City on May 5, 1950. His father, Chester Strasser, was a dress manufacturer. His mother, Sheila (Reisner) Strasser, worked as a copy editor.

YOUTH

Strasser grew up in a middle-class neighborhood on Long Island outside of New York City. "I had a fine childhood in a very nice suburban setting," he recalled. "Like any kid I had my insecurities, but I also had a stable family life, attended good public schools and went to summer camp."

As a youth, Strasser was a self-described "average athlete" and "somewhat obnoxious wise guy whose only unusual trait was a keen interest in . . . creatures from birds through reptiles and including amphibians, fish, and insects. In school they called me 'nature boy' and worse." This early interest in nature and the outdoors was nurtured by numerous fishing, skiing, and camping trips with his family.

EDUCATION

Strasser received his elementary and high school education in the Long Island public school system. "Scholastically I was an underachiever and had a particularly tough time with reading and spelling," he admitted. "In general I did minimal amounts of homework." Still, when a subject caught his interest, he usually devoted large blocks of time to learning more about it. "Those subjects included dinosaurs, sea shells, and James Bond novels," he remembered. He also was an energetic participant in a wide range of sports and other extracurricular school activities.

As a kid, Strasser says that he was a "somewhat obnoxious wise guy whose only unusual trait was a keen interest in . . . creatures from birds through reptiles and including amphibians, fish, and insects. In school they called me 'nature boy' and worse."

Strasser remained a mediocre student in high school. "My best subjects in high school were math and science," he said. "I was a horrible speller . . . and on two separate occasions I was sent to reading tutors because I was reading below grade level." Recalling these early struggles in spelling and reading, Strasser has often expressed amazement that he went on to become a successful writer.

Strasser's teen years coincided with the 1960s, a period of American history in which the nation became divided over issues like the Vietnam War, civil rights, and changing standards of dress and behavior. "In the 1960s we rebelled against the Establishment," he recalled. "The Establishment

said the war in Vietnam was good and the counterculture (long hair, rock music, drugs) was bad. In retrospect they were mostly wrong on the first count and sometimes right (drugs) on the second count. At the time, they appeared to be dead wrong on both counts and I was about as countercultural as they came, and caused my parents all sorts of grief. . . . Sometimes I think I write YA [young adult] books because I'm still trying to resolve the conflicts of my own youth."

When Strasser graduated from high school in 1968, he spent several months partying and roaming the country. "I grew my hair long, listened to Led Zeppelin and rode my motorcycle to the Woodstock festival," he recalled. He then enrolled at New York University, where he investigated careers in medicine and law. But Strasser struggled in both areas of study. In fact, he found himself writing poetry and short stories when he should have been concentrating on lab reports and law papers. He subsequently dropped out of school and spent the next two years hitchhiking around Europe and America.

"For many years after I started writing I never believed I would actually be a writer. I wrote the way some people sing in the shower. In a shower you don't think anyone is going to hear you. I wrote thinking no one was ever going to read me."

Strasser supported himself during his wanderings by taking a variety of temporary jobs. He toiled as a street musician in France and Germany, worked as a deckhand in Denmark, and spent time as a food store clerk in New York. He was also abducted briefly by a group of religious fanatics in South Bend, Indiana. He documented all of these experiences in a journal that he kept. As the months rolled by, Strasser gradually realized that writing in his journal had become one of his greatest pleasures. "It occurred to me that perhaps I should give writing a try as a student and, possibly, some sort of profession," he said. "I enrolled at Beloit College [in Beloit, Wisconsin] and began taking literature and writing courses."

Strasser enjoyed his studies at Beloit. For the first time, he was taking classes that he really enjoyed. In addition, a number of his instructors assured him that they saw evidence of genuine writing talent in his work. Encouraged, Strasser started writing a novel for young adults. This early effort eventually grew into his first published novel, *Angel Dust Blues*. Strasser graduated from Beloit in 1974 with a bachelor's degree.

CHOOSING A CAREER

After graduating from Beloit, Strasser spent several years exploring possible careers. He spent a few months working in Beloit College's public relations department, then accepted a position on the staff of the *Times Herald Record* newspaper in Middleton, New York. He remained with the *Times Herald Record* for less than two years, but his brief career as a reporter further convinced him that he should pursue a writing career. "I guess I decided I wanted to be a novelist while I was working at the newspaper," he remembered. "There were stories I wanted to tell."

In 1976 Strasser left the newspaper to accept a position as a copywriter with a New York City advertising agency. He also supplemented his income by working as a researcher for *Esquire* magazine. In the meantime, he continued to work on *Angel Dust Blues* and other story ideas. He did not have high hopes that he would ever be a published author. He knew that many fiction writers toil for years without ever getting any of their stories published. But by this point in his life, Strasser felt "a tremendous need and desire to write," even if it was only for his own enjoyment. "For many years after I started writing I never believed I would actually be a writer," he explained. "I wrote the way some people sing in the shower. In a shower you don't think anyone is going to hear you. I wrote thinking no one was ever going to read me." Strasser's modest writing goals remained intact until 1978, when *Angel Dust Blues* was accepted for publication.

CAREER HIGHLIGHTS

Since the late 1970s, Strasser has built a reputation as one of America's most popular and prolific authors of children's books and young adult novels. He has written more than 130 works during that time, including realistic fiction for young adult audiences, humor-laced stories for middle schoolers and younger readers, and novels based on more than three

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> *"Most teens today want books with characters they can identify with. They want to be entertained, not preached to. I try to make my books funny, but not frivolous; readable but not patronizing. There's always an important underlying message that I want to get across. . . . "*

dozen movies for readers of all ages. His works have been translated into more than a dozen languages, and many of them remain very popular years after their first appearance.

Early Successes

The publication of *Angel Dust Blues* in 1979 marked the first milestone in Strasser's long and rewarding career as a fiction writer. The plot of the young adult novel concerns a group of suburban teenagers who become entangled in the dangerous world of drugs. "[The book] was based on an incident that happened in high school to people I knew and I felt it was worth writing about," Strasser said. Reaction to *Angel Dust Blues* was very positive. For example, reviewer Zena Sutherland called the novel "a trenchant and honest story" in the *Bulletin of the Center for Children's Books.* "Strasser's writing has a depth and candor that puts the book's focus on the intricate and at times compassionate development of the characters and their relationships."

Strasser used a cash advance from the sale of *Angel Dust Blues* to start Toggle, Inc., a successful fortune cookie company. He maintained this fortune cookie business for the next decade as a way of supplementing his writing income. But fiction writing remained his first love, especially after his second young adult novel, *Friends Till the End,* was hailed by critics and young readers alike.

Published in 1981, *Friends Till the End* is about a teenager who reassesses his own life and priorities after a casual friend is diagnosed with leukemia. "It is nice to see one of the most promising authors of adolescent fiction . . . live up to his potential in this second novel," wrote Mary K. Chelton in *Voice of Youth Advocates.* "Strasser's style is graceful and understated. . . . A lovely and highly recommended book." Chelton's impressions were echoed by other reviewers, and *Friends Till the End* received special recognition from the American Library Association, the New York Public Library, and other youth literature groups.

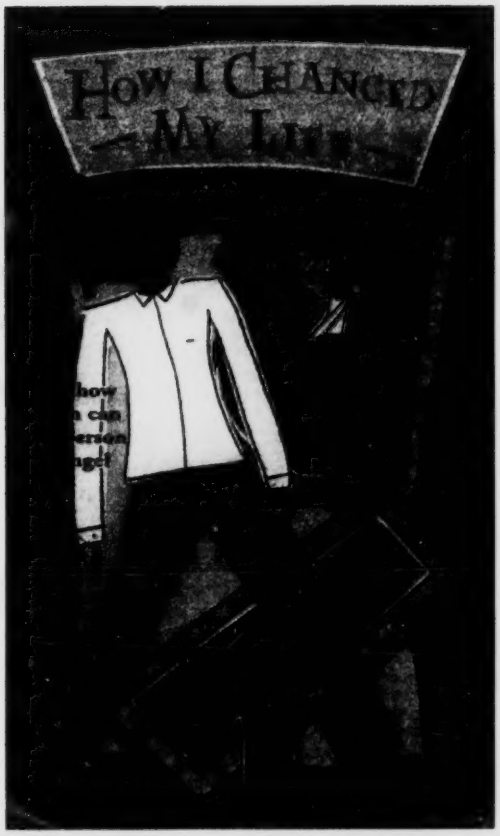
Sensitive Chronicles of Teenage Lives

During the early and mid-1980s, Strasser published several other young adult novels that showed uncommon sensitivity towards teens and understanding of the pressures that they face. In *Workin' for Peanuts* (1983), for example, he discusses teenage prejudices and class issues by exploring the relationship between Jeff, a teen from a working-class family who works after school as a vendor at a baseball stadium, and Melissa, the wealthy daughter of the baseball team owner. *Best Sellers* reviewer Diane Donovan praised the work as "a readable, engrossing tale which will capture and hold reader attention and provide unusual insight into the differences between poverty and wealth."

In *The Accident* (1988), Strasser tackles the subject of teenage drinking. And in *A Very Touchy Subject* (1985), Strasser discusses issues of friendship and sexual promiscuity. This novel, which was turned into a 1986 ABC Afterschool Special called *Can a Guy Say No?*, explores the relationship between a 17-year-old boy named Scott and 15-year-old Paula, an unhappy girl with a poor home life who consents to sex with boys in a desperate bid to gain friends. As the story unfolds, Scott helps guide Paula to a greater understanding of her worth and value as a person. "The author is an acute observer of the teenage scene and presents a humorous, no doubt accurate, rendering of the absorptions and conversations of teenage boys," wrote Ann Flowers in *Horn Book*. "The value of the book is the author's optimistic view of the basic kindness and good sense of young people."

By the late 1980s, Strasser's ability to combine an appealing writing style with plots that explore serious teen issues had made him a respected voice in American young adult literature. "Strasser's main characters are searching to understand their values and to develop a moral code to live by, often receiving mixed or confusing messages from the adults around them," explained Elaine Stephens in *Writing for Young Adults*. "Strasser's realistic fiction frequently deals with issues of popularity and social class."

> *"[The teen years] are the most important time in terms of getting a reader for life. If we give them books that they are not going to enjoy on a primary level, that they're not going to be entertained by, we may be losing readers for life. I don't think we can afford to do that."*



For his part, Strasser believes that effective young adult fiction has to be both entertaining and educational to have an impact on its audience. "Most teens today want books with characters they can identify with," he said. "They want to be entertained, not preached to. I try to make my books funny, but not frivolous; readable but not patronizing. There's always an important underlying message that I want to get across. . . . [The teen years] are the most important time in terms of getting a reader for life. If we give them books that they are not going to enjoy on a primary level, that they're not going to be entertained by, we may be losing readers for life. I don't think we can afford to do that."

Strasser Targets Other Audiences

During the 1980s, Strasser also branched out into other areas of literature. In 1981 he wrote a novelization for the screenplay of *The Wave*, an ABC TV movie. For this first novelization, Strasser chose to write under the pseudonym Morton Rhue. But he used his real name for a series of similar assignments over the next several years. In fact, his breezy, teen-friendly writing style soon made him one of Hollywood's top choices for converting movie screenplays to novels. For example, he wrote the novelizations for such blockbuster films as *Ferris Bueller's Day Off* (1986), *Home Alone* (1990), *Free Willy* (1993), *Rookie of the Year* (1993), and *Jumanji* (1995).

Strasser also published a series of books that expanded his reading audience to include elementary and middle school kids. These light-hearted books combined humor, suspense, science fiction, and elements of the supernatural into an appealing stew that proved tremendously popular to younger readers. In *The Mall from Outer Space* (1987), for example, the author spins a tale about extraterrestrial aliens who build a series of shopping malls around the world for mysterious reasons. Strasser also developed a handful of ongoing series for younger readers. These included the *Words-*

worth series, which follows the adventures of a good-natured dog, and the *Help! I'm Trapped* series. The *Help!* series details the crazy experiences of a boy named Jake who runs afoul of a mind-swapping machine invented by his science teacher. Over the course of the series, the luckless Jake has found himself inhabiting the bodies of numerous characters, ranging from his gym teacher and the school lunch lady to Santa Claus, a dog, and a professional wrestler. No matter how outrageous the storylines become, however, Strasser manages to incorporate themes of respect, integrity, and self-acceptance into every book.

"I guess I originally wrote a lot of books for teens because that was where I had my first success and felt the most confident," Strasser explained when asked about his many different audiences. "But as I grow older, I find my interests widening not only towards writing books for older people, but for younger ones as well. I'd like to think that the day will come when I will write books for people of all ages, from three to eighty-three."

A Busy Writer

Strasser's series for young readers brought him legions of new fans in the 1990s. But he has also maintained a strong presence among young adult readers during that period. In 1995, for example, he published *How I Changed My Life,* a humorous but sensitive portrait of two high schoolers—an overweight girl and an injured football star—who learn about themselves and each other during the production of a school play. One year later, in *Girl Gives Birth to Own Prom Date,* Strasser tells about the evolving relationship between a girl and a boy on opposite ends of the high school social spectrum. In 1999 a film version of this book called *Drive Me Crazy,* starring Melissa Joan Hart, was released to mediocre reviews.

Both *How I Changed My Life* and *Girl Gives Birth to Own Prom Date* added to Strasser's reputation as an observant commentator on teen self-image and self-esteem. "This is an author who really has his

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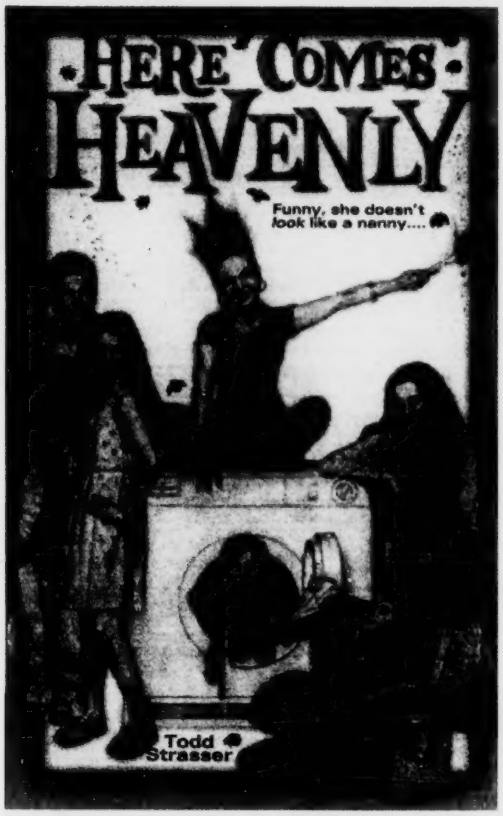

finger on the way kids think, and he never strikes a false note," said one youth librarian in the *New York Times* in 1997. "He's funny. He has a light touch, but through it all you feel his heart and his humanity coming through."

Since the mid-1990s, Strasser has continued to pen stories for both young adult and children's audiences. His recent books range from new installments of his *Help! I'm Trapped* series, to kid-friendly outdoor adventure tales like *Grizzly Attack* (1999), to *How I Spent My Last Night on Earth* (1998), a young adult title that discusses boy-girl relationships and other issues of interest to teens. Another recent book is *Here Comes Heavenly* (1999), a funny first book in what is intended to be a new series for young adults. Heavenly is a nanny, like Mary Poppins or Mrs. Piggle-Wiggle—but she has spiky purple hair, a pierced eyebrow, and tattoos. Today, more than two decades after he first emerged as a noted children's author, Strasser's writing output shows no sign of slowing down. "I love to lose myself in the story [I'm writing]," he explained. "It's sort of like being in a daydream all day long. It's like experiencing lives and places I've never been. It's like playing pretend when you were a kid."

Writing for Young People

Strasser admits that it is a challenge to write convincingly about teenage issues and perspectives. In fact, he decided to make a special effort to keep informed about teen concerns and trends after launching his writing career. "My first couple of young adult books are based almost completely on factual experience and observation," he stated. Gradually, however, "my memories of my teen years grew dimmer and more difficult to understand. Soon I began to wonder if I really did know anything about teenagers. I worried that I was out of touch. . . . The day finally came when I woke up to the realization that the only way I could continue writing about teens was

to leave my IBM PC behind and venture into the turbulent and misty world they inhabited."

Strasser subsequently became a regular presence at area high school athletic events, rock concerts, video arcades, fast food joints, beaches, and other places where teens hang out. He also educates himself about the challenges facing modern-day teens by reading a lot of journals and books that study teen issues. But Strasser believes that "the single most important thing I do to keep up with teens is accept invitations to speak at junior high and high schools all over the country."

In fact, Strasser does not view this part of his career as a chore. "One of my most surprising aspects of becoming a writer, for me, has been the development of a parallel career as a public speaker," he admitted. "Each year I am asked to speak about writing to students at schools and to teachers and librarians at conferences. I find that I love entertaining a crowd almost as much as I love writing."

Strasser has also made a special effort to reach male readers in many of his book. He complains that most young adult fiction fails to recognize that adolescence is a period of intense emotional pressure and turmoil for boys as well as girls. "There are millions of books about teenage girls with crushes," he pointed out. "Teenage girls have crushes on everybody—the boy next door, the brother of the boy next door, the cousin of the boy next door. How many books are there about boys with crushes? There are so few. Does this mean that very few boys have teenage crushes? *I* was a teenage boy, and I had lots of crushes—the girl next door, the cousin of the girl next door. . . . What I

"There are millions of books about teenage girls with crushes. Teenage girls have crushes on everybody—the boy next door, the brother of the boy next door, the cousin of the boy next door. How many books are there about boys with crushes? There are so few. Does this mean that very few boys have teenage crushes? I was a teenage boy, and I had lots of crushes—the girl next door, the cousin of the girl next door. . . . What I try to do in my books is present boyish *boys, but I try to make them real boys, with emotions and sensitivities. . . . I do not write books solely for teenage boys, but I write books that teenage boys will read."*

try to do in my books is present *boyish* boys, but I try to make them *real* boys, with emotions and sensitivities. . . . I do not write books solely for teenage boys, but I write books that teenage boys will read."

MARRIAGE AND FAMILY

Strasser married Pamela Older, a magazine publishing executive, on July 2, 1981. They have a daughter, Lia, and a son, Geoff. They live in Larchmont, New York.

HOBBIES AND OTHER INTERESTS

Strasser is a lifelong sports fan, but he has a wide range of other interests as well. "I like to fish, play tennis, ski, go to movies, read, do carpentry and other repairs around the house, and some low-level gardening," he said. "I also like to play with my kids and help and watch them grow."

SELECTED WRITINGS

Fiction for Young Adults

Angel Dust Blues, 1979
Friends Till the End, 1981
Rock 'n' Roll Nights, 1982
Workin' for Peanuts, 1982
Turn It Up!, 1984
A Very Touchy Subject, 1984
Rock It to the Top, 1987
Wildlife, 1987
The Accident, 1988
The Family Man, 1988 (adult)
Beyond the Reef, 1989
Moving Target, 1989
The Diving Bell, 1992
Summer's End, 1993
Summer's Promise, 1993
How I Changed My Life, 1995
The Boys in the Band, 1996
Girl Gives Birth to Own Prom Date, 1996 (also published as *How I Created My Perfect Prom Date*)
Playing for Love, 1996
My Best Last Night on Earth, 1998
Close Call, 1999
Here Comes Heavenly, 1999

Fiction for Children

The Complete Computer Popularity Program, 1984
The Mall from Outer Space, 1987
Please Don't Be Mine, Julie Valentine, 1994
Abe Lincoln for Class President!, 1995
Howl-a-ween, 1995
Hey Dad, Get a Life!, 1998
Kidnap Kids, 1998
Buzzard's Feast, 1999
Gator Prey, 1999
Anakin Skywalker, 1999
Y2K-9: The Dog Who Saved the World, 1999
Grizzly Attack, 1999

Help! I'm Trapped Series

Help! I'm Trapped in My Teacher's Body, 1993
Help! I'm Trapped in the First Day of School, 1994
Help! I'm Trapped in Obedience School, 1995
Help! I'm Trapped in My Gym Teacher's Body, 1996
Help! I'm Trapped in the President's Body, 1996
Help! I'm Trapped in My Sister's Body, 1997
Help! I'm Trapped in Obedience School Again, 1997
Help! I'm Trapped in Santa's Body, 1997
Help! I'm Trapped in the First Day of Summer Camp, 1997
Help! I'm Trapped in an Alien's Body, 1998
Help! I'm Trapped in a Movie Star's Body, 1999
Help! I'm Trapped in My Lunch Lady's Body, 1998
Help! I'm Trapped in a Professional Wrestler's Body, 2000

Novelizations

The Wave, 1981 (written as Morton Rhue)
Ferris Bueller's Day Off, 1986
Cookie, 1988
Pink Cadillac, 1989
Home Alone, 1990
Home Alone 2: Lost in New York, 1992
Honey, I Blew Up the Kids, 1992
Addams Family Values, 1993
The Beverly Hillbillies, 1993
Free Willy, 1993

The Good Son, 1993
Hocus Pocus, 1993
Rookie of the Year, 1993
Super Mario Brothers, 1993
The Three Musketeers, 1993
The Villains Collection, 1993
Disney's It's Magic: Stories from the Films, 1994
Miracle on 34th Street, 1994
The Pagemaster, 1994
Richie Rich, 1994
Street Fighter, 1994
Tall Tale: The Unbelievable Adventures of Pecos Bill, 1994
3 Ninjas Kick Back, 1994
Walt Disney's Lady and the Tramp, 1994
Walt Disney's Peter Pan, 1994
Free Willy 2: The Adventure Home, 1995
Jumanji, 1995
Man of the House, 1995
Home Alone 3, 1997

HONORS AND AWARDS

Best Books for Young Adults (American Library Association): 1981, for *Friends Till the End;* 1982, for *Rock 'n' Roll Nights*
Book for the Teen Age Award (New York Public Library): 1981, for *Angel Dust Blues;* 1982, for *The Wave* and *Friends to the End;* 1983, for *Rock 'n' Roll Nights;* 1984, for *Workin' for Peanuts;* 1996, for *Girl Gives Birth to Perfect Prom Date*
Notable Children's Trade Book (National Council for Social Studies): 1982, for *Friends Till the End*

FURTHER READING

Books

Authors and Artists for Young Adults, Vol. 2, 1989
Broderick, Dorothy M., ed. *The VOYA Reader,* 1990
Contemporary Authors New Revision Series, Vol. 47, 1995
Drew, Bernard. *The 100 Most Popular Young Adult Authors,* 1996
Gallo, Donald R., ed. *Speaking for Ourselves: Autobiographical Sketches by Notable Authors of Books for Young Adults,* 1990
Gallo, Donald R., ed. *Authors' Insights: Turning Teenagers into Readers and Writers,* 1992

Hipple, Ted, ed. *Writers for Young Adults,* 1997
Holtze, Sally Holmes. *Sixth Book of Junior Authors and Illustrators,* 1989
Roginski, Jim. *Behind the Covers: Interviews with Authors and Illustrators of Books for Children and Young Adults,* 1985
St. James Guide to Young Adult Writers, 1999
Something About the Author, Vol. 71, 1993

Periodicals

New York Times, Oct. 12, 1997, p.1 (section 14WC)
New Yorker, Jan. 24, 1977, p.28
Publishers Weekly, Jan. 18, 1999, p.198

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WORLD WIDE WEB SITES

http://www.teacher.scholastic/com/authorsandbooks/authors/strasser/bio.htm
http://www.teacher.scholastic/com/authorsandbooks/authors/strasser/tscript.htm

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Jacqueline Woodson 1964?-

American Writer of Realistic Fiction for Young Adults
Author of *I Hadn't Meant to Tell You This* and *From the Notebooks of Melanin Sun*

BIRTH

Jacqueline Woodson was born on February 12, 1964 (some sources say 1963), in Columbus, Ohio. She was the third child born to Jack and Mary Ann Woodson. Jacqueline had an older brother and an older sister, as well as a younger brother.

YOUTH

Woodson's parents divorced when she was very young. She and her older siblings then moved to Greenville, South Carolina, to live with their grandparents. At the age of six, she moved to Brooklyn, New York, to live with her mother. Throughout her teenage years, Woodson traveled back and forth between New York and South Carolina, and also between two different lifestyles. Her grandparents were fairly wealthy, while her mother was struggling to raise four children on her own. But Woodson never felt that she really belonged in either place.

Although she loved to read as a child, Woodson found it difficult to identify with the characters in books of that time. "So few books published in the 1970s reflected the existence of marginal people—and already, at nine, ten, eleven, I understood myself to be marginal," she explained. As a result, Woodson spent a great deal of time "searching the pages of the books available to me for people like my people; reading the books where I found tiny pieces of myself over and over again." Eventually, she discovered the work of African-American authors like James Baldwin, Toni Cade Bambara, Rosa Guy, and Langston Hughes [see the entry on Hughes in this volume of *Biography Today Authors*]. Years later, Woodson collected the works of these and other black writers in her book *A Way Out of No Way: Writings about Growing Up Black in America*.

> ***"I used to write on everything. It was the thing I liked to do the most. I never thought I could have a career as a writer—I always thought it was something I would have to do on the side."***

Woodson first began writing during the 1970s. She sat on her porch and wrote angry poems and song lyrics to express the pain and alienation she felt growing up as a black girl in American society. "The bitterness of [the] Vietnam [War], the scandal of Watergate [the political scandal that led to the resignation of President Richard Nixon in 1974], poverty, inadequate housing and education—the list goes on—became our everyday experience," she recalled. "The world became a place that didn't welcome me and the people I loved, and in response I stepped outside of the world. From this vantage point, I watched and took notes."

Another factor that made Woodson's childhood difficult was that she was a victim of sexual abuse. Between the ages of six and 13, she was sexually

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molested by her mother's boyfriend. This abuse had a terrible effect on her self-image and also affected her behavior during her teen years. "I started chasing boys in the fifth grade, had my first boyfriend and first kiss in sixth grade, and was having sex by the time I was 13," she noted. "It wasn't until I began my healing process that I also began to understand that most survivors of sexual abuse are sexually precocious, and that this is a typical warning sign in sexually abused children." Woodson was so devastated by these early experiences that she even considered suicide in her early 20s, but recalled that "by my will, my strength, and the grace of God, I survived."

EDUCATION

Since Woodson was a good writer, she became the editor of her elementary school's magazine in the fifth grade. Her seventh-grade teacher, Mr. Miller, returned a story she wrote for class with the comment "You are the real thing." Still, it took a while before Woodson realized that she could make a living by writing. "I used to write on everything. It was the thing I liked to do the most," she remembered. "I never thought I could have a career as a writer—I always thought it was something I would have to do on the side."

Woodson decided "to write about communities that were familiar to me and people that were familiar to me. I wanted to write about communities of color. I wanted to write about girls. I wanted to write about friendship and all of these things that I felt like were missing in a lot of the books I read as a child."

Woodson was popular and a good student in high school. She served as the vice president of her class and as a member of the cheerleading squad. With the encouragement of her teachers, she finally decided to pursue writing as a career. She became determined to write the kind of books she longed to read. Woodson explained that she wanted "to write about communities that were familiar to me and people that were familiar to me. I wanted to write about communities of color. I wanted to write about girls. I wanted to write about friendship and all of these things that I felt like were missing in a lot of the books I read as a child."

After graduating from high school, Woodson went on to attend Adelphi University in Garden City, New York. She became a member of the Afri-

can-American sorority Alpha Kappa Alpha in college. She also came to an important realization about her sexual identity. "Because college was a time of change and growing, I grew to know myself better, met women who loved women and realized that I, too, felt this way," she noted. "After years of trying to fit comfortably into the stature of a straight woman, I came out as a lesbian." Woodson graduated from Adelphi in 1985 with a bachelor's degree in English.

"There are all kinds of people in the world, and I want to help introduce readers to the kinds of people they might not otherwise meet. Young people are eager to see beyond their own existence, and we must respect this. They must be allowed to transcend color, class, or sexuality; to grow bigger, more whole."

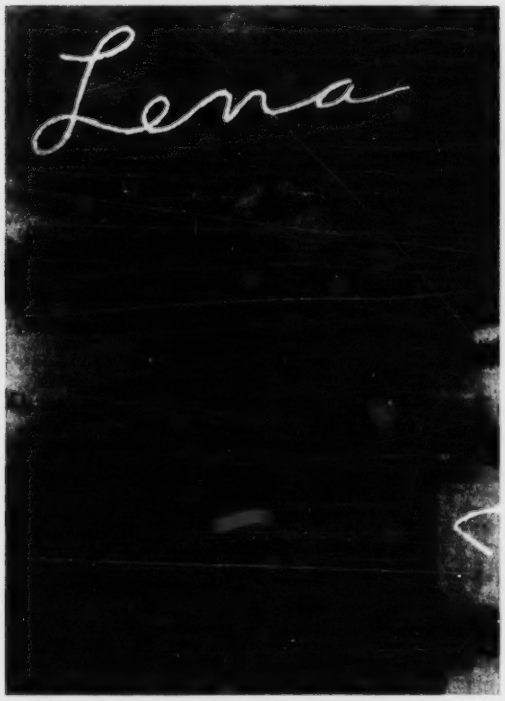
CAREER HIGHLIGHTS

Jacqueline Woodson is widely considered to be one of the best writers for young adults to emerge during the 1990s. Critics have praised her ability to get inside the minds of teenagers and present the issues that concern them in a clear and compassionate manner. Many of Woodson's books center around teenaged girls who are outside of the mainstream of American society. Like Woodson herself, the characters in her realistic fiction are often outsiders from broken families or poor neighborhoods. They also frequently struggle with issues of racial or sexual identity.

Some of Woodson's books include mature themes that some people consider inappropriate for a teen audience. For example, the characters in her novels face issues that include teen pregnancy, homosexuality, sexual abuse, eating disorders, mental illness, racism, poverty, and class conflict. Woodson believes that it is important to expose young adults to these sorts of issues. "There are all kinds of people in the world, and I want to help introduce readers to the kinds of people they might not otherwise meet," she stated. "Young people are eager to see beyond their own existence, and we must respect this. They must be allowed to transcend color, class, or sexuality; to grow bigger, more whole."

The "Maizon and Margaret" Series

Immediately after graduating from college, Woodson set out to write novels for young adults. She also wrote magazine articles and worked at part-



time jobs to help pay the bills. For example, she worked as a free-lance word processor, and she did drama therapy with runaway and homeless kids in East Harlem. In 1990, Woodson published her first book, *Last Summer with Maizon.*

Last Summer with Maizon is the first book in a three-part series about the friendship between two 11-year-old African-American girls growing up in Brooklyn. Maizon and Margaret are together constantly until the summer when Margaret's father dies and Maizon accepts a scholarship to an elite girls' boarding school in Connecticut. While the outgoing Maizon is away, quiet Margaret discovers a talent for writing and wins a city-wide poetry competition. Meanwhile, Maizon struggles to fit in and make friends at her new school. Although some critics said that *Last Summer with Maizon* lacked focus, many reviewers praised Woodson's realistic picture of the friendship between two girls. "The book does an excellent job of demonstrating both subtle and not-so-subtle racism and gently points to the ways in which class differences affect relationships and friendships," Nicola Morris wrote in *Contemporary African-American Novelists.*

The second book in the series, *Maizon at Blue Hill* (1992), focuses on Maizon's experiences at boarding school. The white students at Blue Hill do not accept her because she is black. But Maizon has trouble fitting in with the few black students at the school as well. Finally, Maizon decides to return home and attend a school for gifted students in her old neighborhood. "I'm going to try and find a place where I can fit in being both black and smart," she says. "There has to be a place somewhere, right?" Reviewers praised *Maizon at Blue Hill* for its strong characters and sharp focus. A writer for *Publishers Weekly* claimed that Woodson provides "a perspective on racism and elitism rarely found in fiction for this age group."

The third book in the series, *Between Madison and Palmetto* (1993), follows what happens after Maizon returns to Brooklyn. First, Maizon finds that

her relationship with Margaret has changed. Margaret has become more solitary and does not seem to need Maizon as much. Maizon also discovers that her old neighborhood is changing. New apartments have attracted a number of white residents to the area. Eventually, Maizon makes friends with a white girl. She also learns that Margaret has developed an eating disorder. Critics praised Woodson for bringing her characters and their community to life. But *Between Madison and Palmetto* is generally considered the weakest book in the series because it "tries to support too many issues and themes . . . without the space necessary to resolve them," Michael Cart noted in *Twentieth-Century Children's Writers.*

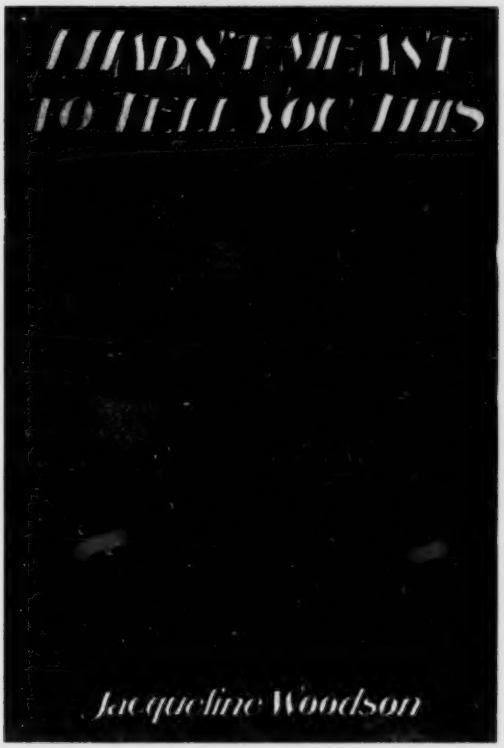
Dealing with Difficult Issues

Woodson classifies the "Maizon and Margaret" series among her "good" books, meaning that they are acceptable to most parents and librarians. In contrast, many of her other books deal with difficult and controversial themes that some people consider inappropriate for young adults. After *Last Summer with Maizon* was published in 1990, Woodson received many invitations to visit schools and libraries. But when her novel *The Dear One* came out in 1991, she noticed that such invitations became rare.

> ***"I feel compelled to write against stereotypes, hoping people will see that some issues know no color, class, sexuality. I don't feel as though I have a commitment to one community—I don't want to be shackled this way. I write from the very depths of who I am, and in this place there are all of my identities."***

The Dear One, which was published between the first two "Maizon and Margaret" books, tells the story of a 12-year-old African-American girl named Afeni, which means "dear one" in Swahili. Afeni lives a comfortable life in a middle-class neighborhood. But her life becomes complicated when 15-year-old Rebecca, the pregnant daughter of her mother's best friend, comes to live with them. Rebecca comes from a poor family and a tough city neighborhood. At first, the two girls feel angry and resentful toward one another. But they eventually begin to understand and accept each other with the support of a lesbian couple that is friends with both of their mothers. At the end of the book, Rebecca names her baby Afeni before putting it up for adoption.

Some people questioned whether Woodson's themes of teen pregnancy and homosexuality were appropriate for a teen audience. "People say you



can't put all that material into a book for young people because it'll distress them or they won't be able to absorb it all," she explained. "But I believe children's minds compartmentalize—they will put stuff away until they're ready to deal with it." *Horn Book* reviewer Rudine Sims Bishop agreed, claiming that teen readers would find *The Dear One* "engaging in its frank and straightforward approach."

I Hadn't Meant to Tell You This

Woodson took up another difficult subject—sexual abuse—in her 1994 book, *I Hadn't Meant to Tell You This*. In this novel, 12-year-old Marie lives in a wealthy African-American suburb. She makes friends with a poor white girl named Lena. Despite their different races and social classes, the two girls bond because they have both lost their mothers (Lena's mother died of cancer, while Marie's mother abandoned her family). Eventually, Marie learns that Lena is being sexually abused by her father. When Marie is unable to help, Lena ends up taking her younger sister and running away from home.

"I was inspired to write *I Hadn't Meant to Tell You This* for a lot of reasons," Woodson said. "I really wanted to write about friendship. I really wanted to write about people crossing racial lines to be friends, and people crossing class lines. I wanted to write about what it meant to be a girl in this society, in a society where self-esteem seems to go down when you reach a certain age. And the characters just started coming to me."

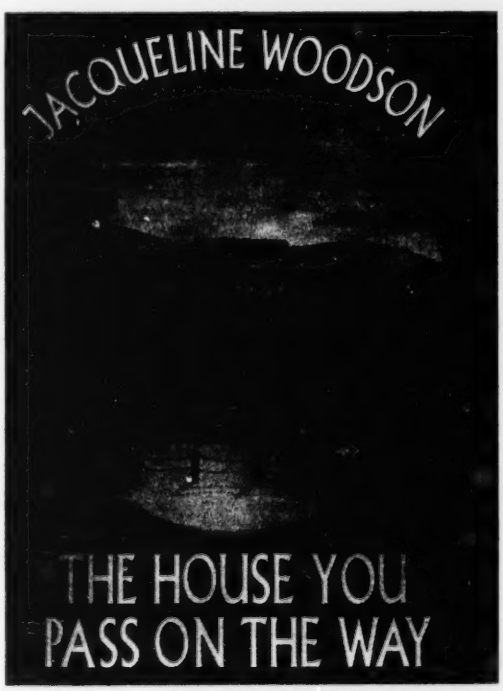
She continued, "There are a lot of themes in *I Hadn't Meant to Tell You This* that I feel strongly about. I feel strongly about the theme of friendship across race lines. And I feel strongly about the issue of sexual abuse. . . . I wanted to write about how people feel so alone, how they feel like, 'Oh, it's only me that this is happening to and therefore it is my fault.' Lena started coming out of that, my desire to write about that. I wanted to write about freedom . . . how it's okay to feel like you need to be free of something and it's okay to leave sometimes. I wanted to write about when it's okay to leave and when it's okay to stay. And I wanted to write about the idea of

being on the outside. I think, growing up, I felt like I was on the outside a lot; and I think as a grown-up, I've sort of come to terms with that, and realized that it's okay to be on the outside."

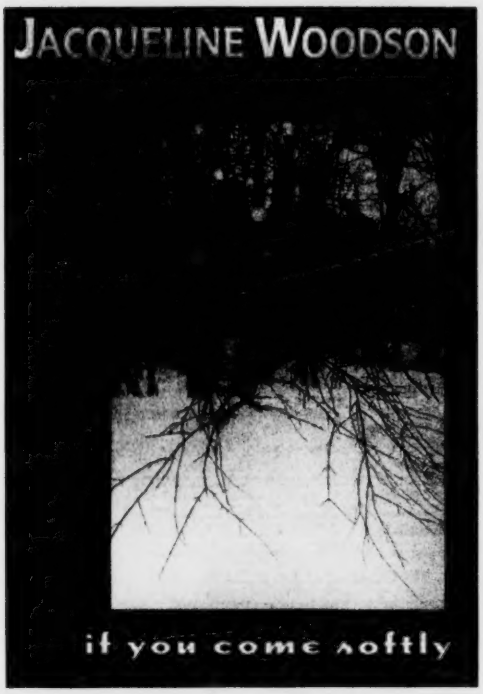
I Hadn't Meant to Tell You This received a 1995 Coretta Scott King Honor Award as one of the year's best young adult novels by a black writer. In *From Romance to Realism,* Michael Cart claimed that "Woodson's talent, intelligence, and compassionate understanding of her characters find their finest expression" in this book. He also called the novel "beautiful in [its] passion and in [its] righteous anger at the horrors the world visits on young women." In 1999, she published a sequel called *Lena,* which tells what happens to Lena after she runs away. She and her sister try to find their mother's family in Kentucky, but they end up being pointed back toward Marie.

Recent Works

Woodson has continued to explore difficult and sometimes controversial topics in her more recent works as well. Her next book was *From the Notebooks of Melanin Sun* (1995), for which she received another Coretta Scott King Honor Award In this book, a young African-American boy named Melanin Sun tells about his life in his private notebooks. Melanin enjoys a close relationship with his mother, loves sports, and is very popular in his neighborhood. One day, Melanin learns that his mother is a lesbian and has fallen in love with a white woman. At first, Melanin is troubled by his mother's sexual identity and by the negative reaction in the community. But he eventually accepts both his mother and her partner. Critics praised the book for accurately capturing the boy's feelings. In a review for *VOYA,* Hazel Moore noted that "Woodson has addressed with care and skill the sensitive issues of homosexuality within the family."



In her 1997 book, *The House You Pass on the Way,* Woodson presents a teenaged girl struggling to understand her own sexual identity. Evangeline is a 14-year-old girl from a mixed-race family.



As she rebels against her family, she insists that everyone call her Staggerlee, after the hero of a folk song. On a summer vacation, Staggerlee forms a close relationship with another rebellious girl named Trout. Once the summer ends, Trout writes a letter to Staggerlee explaining that she has found a boyfriend. But as Staggerlee looks back on the summer, she realizes that her confused feelings toward Trout may mean she is a lesbian. The book was praised for dealing with difficult issues about emerging sexuality and biracial families with sensitivity and respect.

In 1998 Woodson published *If You Come Softly*, a novel about a teenage inter-racial couple. Jeremiah (called Miah), who is African-American, and Ellie, who is white and Jewish, both attend a private high school in Manhattan. Alternating chapters tell their stories as they meet, fall in love, and deal with the consequences of being an inter-racial couple in an intolerant society. Like her other novels, *If You Come Softly* is a powerful story that directly confronts social prejudice.

Woodson's most recent book is *Miracle's Boys* (2000), about three brothers who live together in New York. Lafayette, age 12 and the youngest of the three, tells their story. The boys have been left orphaned—their father died years ago, and their mother (Milagro, called Miracle) recently died because she couldn't afford the insulin she needed to treat her diabetes. Now the boys are on their own. Oldest brother Ty'ree has given up his plans for college and a career in science. Instead, he works in a publishing company mailroom so he can support his brothers. Middle brother Charlie has just come home; he robbed a candy store several years ago and was just released from the correctional facility. But Charlie is angry with the world and taking it out on his family. Between dealing with his angry brother and his own feelings of grief about his mother's death, Lafayette is devastated and his world is falling apart. "Readers will be caught up in this searing and gritty story of their struggle," a commentator for *Kirkus Reviews* predicted. "Woodson composes a plot without easy answers, and creates characters for whom predicable behavior is all but impossible. [*Miracle's*

Boys is a] decent involving novel about a family struggling to remain intact in spite of tremendous obstacles."

Writing for Teens Outside the Mainstream

Woodson was inspired to write novels for young adults by her difficult childhood and teen years. She remembers how she felt as a kid, and she presents those feelings in her books. "I believe young people want honesty," she explained. "If you tell a story as you remember it at their age, they'll read it. If you talk down to them or try to show them how much you've learned, they'll turn away."

Most of Woodson's books focus on female characters. She believes that it is important for teenaged girls, and especially African-American girls, to read positive stories about people like themselves. "Girls rarely get discussed in books and films, and I want to do 'girl stories' to show strong, independent people. I think girls are often disregarded in this society and taught to be dependent," she explained. "I write about black girls because this world would like to keep us invisible. I write about all girls because I know what happens to self-esteem when we turn 12, and I hope to show readers the number of ways in which we are strong."

"Girls rarely get discussed in books and films, and I want to do 'girl stories' to show strong, independent people. I think girls are often disregarded in this society and taught to be dependent. I write about black girls because this world would like to keep us invisible. I write about all girls because I know what happens to self-esteem when we turn 12, and I hope to show readers the number of ways in which we are strong.""

Woodson resists being categorized as a black writer or a lesbian writer. Instead, she tries to include all parts of herself in her books. "I feel compelled to write against stereotypes, hoping people will see that some issues know no color, class, sexuality," she stated. "I don't feel as though I have a commitment to one community—I don't want to be shackled this way. I write from the very depths of who I am, and in this place there are all of my identities."

In all of her books, Woodson writes about young people who are different in some way. "Every character I write about is in some way outside of the

mainstream—black, working-class poor white, a pregnant teen, gay," she noted. By writing about outsiders, Woodson hopes to reassure young readers who may be struggling to accept their own differences. "One of the most important ideas I want to get across to my readers is the idea of feeling like you're okay with who you are," she said. "[It] may help a child who is coming out or struggling with abuse or with family or with health to acquire a clearer vision of the world and thereby grow up stronger."

ADVICE TO YOUNG WRITERS

"I get asked a lot about what can a person do to become a writer. I think it's really important if a young person wants to write, for them to write every day. And it's hard sometimes. It's so much easier to turn on the television or turn on a video game or go outside and hang out. But you really have to write every single day, at least for 30 minutes—just sitting down and writing in your diary or writing a letter to a friend or writing a poem or anything, but just try to practice writing every day. And the other way I learned how to write was by reading so much. I would read a book by Toni Morrison and say, 'I want to write like this one day,' and I think that other authors taught me how to write. I didn't really take a whole lot of writing classes, I learned it from reading. So I say read and write."

HOME AND FAMILY

Woodson lives in Brooklyn, New York, with her lesbian partner.

SELECTED WRITINGS

Young Adult Fiction

Last Summer with Maizon, 1990
The Dear One, 1991
Maizon at Blue Hill, 1992
Between Madison and Palmetto, 1993
The Book Chase, 1993
I Hadn't Meant to Tell You This, 1994
From the Notebooks of Melanin Sun, 1995
A Way Out of No Way: Writing about Growing Up Black in America, 1996 (editor)
The House You Pass on the Way, 1997
Sweet, Sweet Memory, 1998
That Summer, 1998

Visiting Day, 1998
If You Come Softly, 1998
Lena, 1999
Miracle's Boys, 2000

Children's Fiction

Martin Luther King, Jr. and His Birthday, 1996
We Had a Picnic This Sunday Past, 1997
Miss Grace's House, 2000

Adult Fiction

Autobiography of a Family Photo, 1995

HONORS AND AWARDS

Notable Children's Book (American Library Association): 1995, for *I Hadn't Meant to Tell You This*
Best Book for Young Adults (American Library Association): 1995, for *I Hadn't Meant to Tell You This*
Booklist Editor's Choice: 1995, for *I Hadn't Meant to Tell You This*
Horn Book Fanfare Book: 1995, for *I Hadn't Meant to Tell You This*
Jane Addams Children's Book Award (Jane Addams Peace Association): 1995, 1996
Award for Literary Excellence in Fiction (*Kenyon Review*): 1996
Lambda Literary Awards (Lambda Literary Foundation): 1996, for *The House You Pass on the Way*

FURTHER READING

Books

Authors and Artists for Young Adults, Vol. 21, 1997
Carr, Michael. *From Romance to Realism: 50 Years of Growth and Change in Young Adult Literature,* 1996
Contemporary Authors, Vol. 159, 1998
Hipple, Ted, ed. *Writers for Young Adults,* 2000
Nelson, Emmanuel S. *Contemporary African-American Novelists,* 1999
St. James Guide to Young Adult Writers, 1999
Something about the Author, Vol. 94, 1998
Twentieth-Century Children's Writers, 1995

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Periodicals

Essence, May 1993, p.81; May 1999, p.148
Horn Book, Sep. 1992, p.616; Sep.-Oct. 1994, pp.562, 601; Nov.-Dec. 1995, p.711; Jan. 1998, p.34
Kirkus Reviews, July 1, 1997, p.1038
Ms., Dec. 1994, p.77
Voice of Youth Advocates, Oct. 1991, p.236; Oct. 1995, p.227

ADDRESS

Bantam Dell Publishing
1540 Broadway
New York, NY 10036

WORLD WIDE WEB SITE

http://www.randomhouse.com/teachersbdd/wood/html

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Patricia C. Wrede 1953-

American Fantasy Fiction Writer
Author of the Lyra Series and the Enchanted Forest Chronicles

BIRTH

Patricia C. Wrede (pronounced "reedy") was born Patricia Collins on March 27, 1953, in Chicago, Illinois. Her father, David Merrill Collins, was a mechanical engineer. Her mother, Monica Marie Buerglar Collins, was a business executive. She is the oldest of five children.

YOUTH

Wrede grew up in the suburbs outside of Chicago. She was attracted to books at an early age, and spent countless hours of her childhood reading in her room or nestled deep in a corner of the living room couch. "I don't think I ever read anything only once," recalled Wrede. She devoured all sorts of books, but was particularly drawn to fantasy and adventure stories like C.S. Lewis's Chronicles of Narnia series. In fact, she still owns a set of classic Wizard of Oz books that she acquired years ago. "[I read] practically everything I could get my hands on," she said. "They knew me very well down at the library."

Wrede's interest in reading eventually spurred her to try her own hand at writing. "I started writing fiction in the seventh grade and never really stopped in spite of the fact that for many years I did not really expect writing to be more than a hobby," she remembered. She received encouragement from her entire family in these early attempts at writing. Her mother assisted her in typing up her stories, and her father and younger brothers and sisters all told her how much they liked her imaginative tales.

"I started writing fiction in the seventh grade and never really stopped in spite of the fact that for many years I did not really expect writing to be more than a hobby."

EDUCATION

After graduating from high school in 1970, Wrede enrolled at Carleton College in Minnesota. Surprisingly, she did not pursue her love of literature in college, although she continued to write stories in her spare time. Her good high school grades enabled her to skip freshman English, and she never got around to taking any other English courses during her four years at Carleton. Instead, she majored in biology and filled in the rest of her class load with an assortment of history and art classes. "I'd pick something that I didn't know anything at all about, and I'd take a class in it to see if it turned out to be interesting," she said.

But Wrede points out that even though she did not take any college courses in literature or writing composition, her years at Carleton provided her with valuable skills for her future writing career. "I can't point to any specific facts or bits and pieces of classes that I used in my stories," she said. "Far more important were the research skills I learned." Wrede noted that when one of her stories requires knowledge about odd subjects like horse

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treatment during the 13th century or shipbuilding during the Roman Empire, the library research skills that she developed at Carleton come in very handy. "When you've got a very broad topic and you want to get enough information to do the book, those skills are infinitely valuable."

Wrede earned her bachelor's degree in biology in 1974. She then enrolled in the business school at the University of Minnesota, where she hoped to get a master's degree in business administration (MBA). She immersed herself in her studies, and in 1977 she graduated with her MBA. Years later, Wrede claimed that the business knowledge she picked up at the University of Minnesota gave her an enormous boost in her writing career. "An awful lot of writers seem to overlook the fact that this is a business," she said. "It needs to be handled and treated like a business."

CAREER HIGHLIGHTS

Patricia Wrede has become one of America's leading writers of fantasy fiction over the last two decades. Employing an attractive blend of humor, adventure, and light romance, she has conjured up a number of imaginery worlds that have delighted teen and adult readers alike. Wrede is perhaps best known for her Enchanted Forest Chronicles, but she is also the author of a cycle of novels set in an imaginary land called Lyra. In addition, she has penned several popular fantasies set in ancient England.

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Continuing to Write

After graduating from the University of Minnesota in 1977, Wrede worked for several years as a financial analyst and accountant in Minneapolis for the Minnesota Hospital Association, B. Dalton Booksellers, and Dayton-Hudson Corporation. She continued to work until 1985, when her books were successful enough that she was able to write full time.

While working in business, though, she continued to pursue her interest in writing in the evening and on weekends, even though she felt uncertain of her talents. At first, she concentrated on short stories. "When you're starting out to write, one of the things people tell you is, 'Write short stories

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and learn your craft. When you're selling short stories, then go on to the novel,'" Wrede explained. "Like a good little girl I followed directions and I started off writing short stories, but I never got anywhere." In fact, her story submissions kept getting rejected by editors who observed that the stories seemed more like chapters of larger works. These comments convinced Wrede to abandon short stories and begin work on "what became my first novel [*Shadow Magic*]. I wrote four more novels before I ever sold a short story."

In 1980 Wrede joined a small group of other Minneapolis-area writers who gathered together on a regular basis to discuss writing and offer advice about each other's stories. When Wrede first joined this group, which called itself the "Scribblies," none of its seven members had ever been professionally published. But all seven sold stories for publication as the months went by, and four members eventually launched successful careers as fiction writers. "The group taught me a great deal about good writing, and I remain infinitely grateful to them all," said Wrede.

The World of Lyra

Wrede finished writing her first book, *Shadow Magic,* in 1979. Ace Books accepted the book for publication several months later, and it first appeared in 1982. *Shadow Magic* is a fantasy novel set in the imaginary world of Lyra, a two-mooned planet that is home to a wide range of creatures, including cat-people known as the Wyrd, fairy creatures called Shee, sea-dwelling people known as the Neira, and evil Shadow-born spirits who destroy the minds of the bodies that they inhabit. The novel's central plot concerns Alethia, a princess of the kingdom of Alkyra, and her efforts to unite the four races of the Alkyra against the dreaded threat of the Shadow-born.

Wrede returned to the world of Lyra in several subsequent novels as well. In her second novel, *Daughter of Witches* (1983), the story follows the ad-

ventures of a young servant named Ranira who struggles to survive after being imprisoned as a suspected sorceress. "I wanted to explore some different aspects of this world [of Lyra]," Wrede explained. "One of my complaints about a great deal of fantasy and science fiction is that a planet is generally a very large place, and you don't often get a sense of that. It tends to be much more like a country than a planet; frequently there's not a lot of diversity in terms of culture and history." With this in mind, Wrede set *Daughter of Witches* in an entirely different time and place than her first book, although the magical nature of the planet remained unchanged.

Wrede continued that approach in her later Lyra novels as well. In *The Harp of Imach Thyssel* (1985), Emereck Sterren, a wandering minstrel, and his friend Flindaran, come across a strange castle. There they find the legendary long-lost Harp of Imach Thyssel, which has the power to kill or cure. Their find unleashes sinister and powerful forches, and Emereck is drawn into the struggle between the evil Shadow-born and the Guardians who watch over the world—forces we encounter in other Lyra novels as well.

"I wanted to explore some different aspects of this world [of Lyra]. One of my complaints about a great deal of fantasy and science fiction is that a planet is generally a very large place, and you don't often get a sense of that. It tends to be much more like a country than a planet; frequently there's not a lot of diversity in terms of culture and history."

In *Caught in Crystal* (1987), we meet Kayl, who lives in the village of Copeham and works at an inn. She is soon visited by a sorceress of the Silver Sisterhood and a Varnan wizard. They remind her of her past as a warrior in the Sisterhood and her earlier journey to the Twisted Tower, home to magical forces. Now, they are recruiting Kayl to return to the Twisted Tower, which is disrupting the magical powers of the Sisterhood. The book was praised for incorporating appealing characters and realistic descriptions of family life into a fantasy setting.

In 1994 she added another volume to her Lyra series with *The Raven Ring*. This story features the adventures of a young woman named Eleret, a member of the Cilhar, the legendary warrior tribe. Eleret must leave her mountain stronghold to travel to the city of Ciaron to reclaim her mother's belongings. The most important item is the beautiful Raven Ring, a family

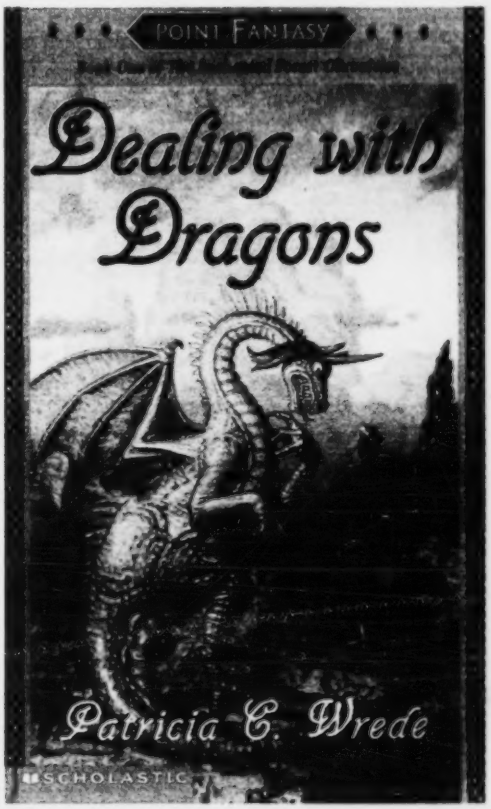
heirloom that Eleret learns is more than it seems. She soon comes up against evil forces seeking to steal the magic ring, which leads to a series of adventures for our heroine. *The Raven Ring* was widely praised as another enjoyable addition to the Lyra series.

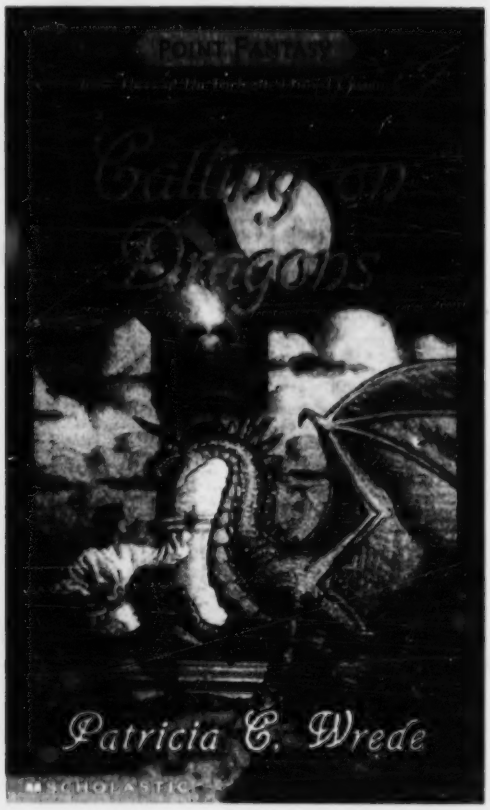
"One of the things I love about the Enchanted Forest is that anything can happen. Of course *if you go into the forest you run into a squirrel who can give you just exactly the directions you need. Of* course *there is a back way into the dragon's cave; there is* always *a way for the hero to succeed in what his quest is. These things always happen in fairy tales. That allows me to do things that I simply couldn't get* away *with doing in any other kind of writing, simply because I can be as outrageous as I want to. I can be as screwy as I want to in the Enchanted Forest."*

The Enchanted Forest Chronicles

In 1985 Wrede published *Talking to Dragons,* which became part of her Enchanted Forest Chronicles. This novel follows the adventures of a youth named Daystar, the son of Cimorene, as he goes on a quest to discover his powers of wizardry. It features Wrede's trademark blend of classic fantasy and modern humor. The novel was popular with earlier fans of Wrede's work, and it brought her new readers as well.

Still, Wrede did not begin to see the book as part of a continuing series until 1986, when young adult novelist Jane Yolen asked her to contribute a short story to an upcoming fantasy anthology. [For additional information on Yolen, see the entry in this volume of *Biography Today Authors.*] Wrede responded with a lighthearted tale called "The Improper Princess," about a princess named Cimorene who becomes so sick of her fancy life as a fairytale princess that she decides to run away and live with dragons. Yolen loved the story, which was published in the 1987 collection *Spaceships and Spells.* A few years later she contacted Wrede again and told her that she had been hired to produce a line of children's books. She then urged Wrede to return to the world described in "The Improper Princess" and create a full-length novel out of the story. Intrigued by the proposal, Wrede returned to the Enchanted Forest fantasy world she had invented in *Talking to Dragons.* She expanded Cimorene's short story adventure into an-





other Enchanted Forest book called *Dealing with Dragons,* a spirited and humorous book full of dastardly wizards, noble dragons, and other interesting characters. But the action in *Dealing with Dragons* actually precedes the events in *Talking to Dragons,* and *Dealing with Dragons* became Book One of the Enchanted Forest Chronicles. Reviewers and readers alike praised this new Enchanted Forest novel, which was released in 1990. Writing in *Best of the Best for Children,* Denise Perry Donavin called *Dealing with Dragons* "a spirited yarn that turns fairy tale convention on its head."

A year later, Wrede published another volume in the Enchanted Forest Chronicles. This work—called *Searching for Dragons,* Book Two of the Enchanted Forest Chronicles—once again follows the brave and resourceful Cimorene as she falls in love with young King Mendanbar and helps him defeat sinister wizards who threaten his kingdom. This Enchanted Forest volume further added to Wrede's reputation as a writer with a knack for combining humor and traditional fantasy into a package that appeals to both younger readers and adults. *Horn Book* reviewer Ann A. Flowers, for example, wrote that *Searching for Dragons* "gives an amusing modern twist to fantasy."

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In 1993 Wrede added another book to the series—*Calling on Dragons*, Book Three of the Enchanted Forest Chronicles. This tale continues the battle between Cimorene and Mendanbar and the wicked wizards. It also sets the scene for the action in *Talking to Dragons*, which stars Cimorene's son Daystar. Since the events in *Talking to Dragons* actually take place after the events in the other three books—even though it was the first of the Enchanted Forest books to be published—*Talking to Dragons* became Book Four of the Enchanted Forest Chronicles.

"I like writing about strong female characters, possibly because there haven't been a lot of them that I could identify with [over the years]. If my strong female characters come from anything it's essentially from the women that I know: My mother, my aunts, my grandmothers, the bosses, the women that I have worked for, or professors that I had in college. They were all very determined, active women. I hadn't seen a whole lot of that particular type in fantasy."

Looking back on the "Dragon" books that comprise the Enchanted Forest Chronicles, Wrede expresses great fondness for the series. "The Enchanted Forest books are so loopy," she said. "One of the things I love about the Enchanted Forest is that anything can happen. Of *course* if you go into the forest you run into a squirrel who can give you just exactly the directions you need. Of *course* there is a back way into the dragon's cave; there is *always* a way for the hero to succeed in what his quest is. These things always happen in fairy tales. That allows me to do things that I simply couldn't get *away* with doing in any other kind of writing, simply because I can be as outrageous as I want to. I can be as screwy as I want to in the Enchanted Forest."

Tales of Ancient England

Despite Wrede's affection for the inhabitants of the Enchanted Forest, she continued to invent other fantasy worlds. In 1988, for example, she joined forces with fellow writer Caroline Stevermer to publish *Sorcery and Cecelia*. This story is set in a fantasy version of England in which magic is so commonplace that classes in wizardry are offered in the public school system. The novel itself consists of letters written between two girl cousins whose lives become entangled in romance and power struggles between rival wizards.

Wrede enjoyed imagining a fantasy version of England so much that she decided to investigate the theme further in her next novel, *Snow White and Rose Red* (1989). In this retelling of the classic fairy tale, Wrede places the characters in Tudor England (England as it was from 1485 through 1603) and has them interact with actual historical figures as well as fairy queens and other mythical creatures. The author's fanciful version of the Snow White legend received wide critical praise, and it was named a *Booklist* Editor's Choice selection for 1989.

Since *Snow White* was published, Wrede has set two other fantasy novels in a bygone era of England. Both *Mairelon the Magician* (1991) and *Magician's Ward* (1997) take place in an alternate version of 19th-century England, the same setting that Wrede used in her book *Sorcery and Cecelia*. Here, magic is real and teenage heroes and heroines triumph over evil. A street urchin named Kim, a girl posing as a boy, is taken on as an apprentice by traveling magician Mairelon, and together, they share a series of adventures. The novels are an entertaining and inventive mix of fantasy, romance, suspense, and historical fiction.

Other Writings

In addition, Wrede has also written other works over the years that contain the same appealing blend of magic and adventure that marks her other books. One such work was *Seven Towers*, a fantasy novel that appeared in 1984. *Seven Towers* concerns a sorceress named Amberglas and the wizard king Carachel, a ruler who turns to black magic in order to protect his kingdom against the magic-killing Matholych. Wrede has also contributed to several science fiction and fantasy collections, including *Spaceships and Spells* (1987), *Liavek: Spells of Binding* (1988), *The Unicorn Treasury* (1988), and *Tales of the Witch World 3* (1990). And in 1996 she published *Book of Enchantments*, a collection of her own fantasy tales writ-

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ten over the years. These charming and witty stories feature strong female heroines and use typical fairy tale and folktale motifs. Recently, Wrede tried something completely different. She wrote *Star Wars—Episode I: The Phantom Menace* (1999), a novel for young readers that retells the entire movie scene by scene.

Attitudes about Writing

Wrede's strong sense of character and her witty imagination have made her one of America's favorite contemporary fantasy writers. As noted in the *St. James Guide to Young Adult Writers*, "her gentle style of romantic fantasy appeals to a large audience and a wide age range. The Enchanted Forest Chronicles reveal her inventiveness and sense of fun, the Lyra books reveal her ability to establish a strong sense of place, and the historical fantasies demonstrate an ability to evoke a believable, recognizable time period."

"I don't consider myself a young adult writer," Wrede says. "I don't write my books aimed at any particular market other than this is stuff I would like to read, *and I don't really consider myself as a young adult anymore. I would like to, but no."*

Yet of all the characteristics attributed to Wrede's writing, perhaps nothing gets more attention than her use of strong, intelligent, and self-confident women. "I like writing about strong female characters," she confirmed, "possibly because there haven't been a lot of them that I could identify with [over the years]. If my strong female characters come from anything it's essentially from the women that I know: My mother, my aunts, my grandmothers, the bosses, the women that I have worked for, or professors that I had in college. They were all very determined, active women. I hadn't seen a whole lot of that particular type in fantasy."

Indeed, Wrede's female characters are often cited as role models for young female readers. But while the author hopes that her female characters have a positive impact on teen girls troubled by poor self-image, she also admits that "I don't consider myself a young adult writer." Wrede appreciates the younger members of her audience, but she also is grateful for the many adult readers who buy her novels and short stories. "I don't write my books aimed at any particular market other than *this is stuff I would like to*

read, and I don't really consider myself as a young adult anymore," she said. "I would like to, but no."

MARRIAGE AND FAMILY

Patricia Collins married James M. Wrede, a financial consultant, on July 24, 1976. They divorced in 1992 without having any children. She is currently single and without children, but she has several nieces and nephews to whom she is very close. Wrede also keeps at least two or three cats as companions in her Minneapolis home. "Cats are traditionally associated with witches and magic," she notes. "It's something about the way those eyes sort of glow in dim light. Also, they're quiet and they sneak up on you. But if you stop and think about it, practically every animal is associated with magic. Horses are associated with magic in many ways, and birds, hawks in particular, fish—the salmon of knowledge in Celtic mythology. But cats do seem to have a certain special something."

HOBBIES AND OTHER INTERESTS

Wrede has a wide range of interests, including sewing, embroidery, gardening, and reading. She is also a vegetarian.

WRITINGS

Lyra Series

Shadow Magic, 1982
Daughter of Witches, 1983
The Harp of Imach Thyssel, 1985
Caught in Crystal, 1987
The Raven Ring, 1994

Enchanted Forest Chronicles

Talking to Dragons, 1985
Dealing with Dragons, 1990
Searching for Dragons, 1991
Calling on Dragons, 1993

Others

The Seven Towers, 1984
Sorcery and Cecelia, 1988 (with Caroline Stevermer)

Snow White and Rose Red, 1989
Mairelon the Magician, 1991
Book of Enchantments, 1996 (short stories)
Magician's Ward, 1997
Star Wars — Episode I: The Phantom Menace, 1999

HONORS AND AWARDS

Books for Young Adults Recommended Reading List: 1984, for *Daughter of Witches*; 1985, for *The Seven Towers*
Booklist Editor's Choice: 1989, for *Snow White and Rose Red*
Best Book for Young Adults (American Library Association): 1991, for *Dealing With Dragons*; 1992, for *Searching for Dragons*
Notable Books for Young Adults (American Library Association): 1993, for *Calling on Dragons*

FURTHER READING

Books

Authors and Artists for Young Adults, Vol. 8, 1992
Contemporary Authors, Vol. 134, 1992
Drew, Bernard A. *The 100 Most Popular Young Adult Authors*, 1996
Holtze, Sally Holmes, ed. *Seventh Book of Junior Authors and Illustrators*, 1996
St. James Guide to Young Adult Writers, 1999
Something About the Author, Vol. 67, 1992
Writers Directory, 1999

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New York, NY 10010

WORLD WIDE WEB SITE

http://www.dendarii.demon.co.uk/Wrede/index.html
http://www.sfwa.org/writing/worldbuilding1.htm

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Jane Yolen 1939-

American Fairy Tale and Fantasy Writer
Author of *Owl Moon, Dragon's Blood, The Young Merlin Trilogy,* and the *Commander Toad* Series

BIRTH

Jane Yolen was born in New York City on February 11, 1939. Her father, William Hyatt Yolen, worked as a journalist and public relations expert. But his true passion was flying kites. He loved kites and helped make them popular in America. In fact, he was so well-known for his kite flying that he was featured in *Life* magazine, the *Guinness Book of World Records,* and

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"I was an omnivorous reader. I remember going to the library [so vividly]. Certainly there was a children's section but nobody discouraged me from trying other things—which I certainly did. I was I think eight years old . . . when I came across a beautiful two-volume boxed book [in my parents' library]. It was just a gorgeous book to touch and feel, so I started reading it. It was Thomas Mann's Joseph in Egypt. *Probably most of it went right over my head, but I remember the touch of it and I read the whole thing. I just couldn't stop reading."*

Ripley's Believe It or Not. Jane's mother, Isabelle Berlin Yolen, was a social worker. But she quit her job and stayed home once Jane and her younger brother, Steven, were born.

YOUTH

Yolen spent her early years in New York City. When the United States became involved in World War II in 1941, her father joined the army and was stationed in Europe. At that time, she went to live with her grandparents in Hampton Roads, Virginia. But her grandfather died a short time later, and she returned to New York.

No matter where Yolen lived, stories and reading were a constant presence in her young life. Storytelling was a talent that was passed down and cherished in her father's family. In fact, her great-grandfather had been a master storyteller in the small village where he lived along the border between Russia and Finland. Yolen's father continued the tradition by working for several newspapers, and her mother wrote stories for women's magazines and also created crossword puzzles. Throughout her childhood, Yolen was surrounded by people who had active imaginations and loved to tell stories. This led her to reading books, where she could find all the stories she wanted.

"I was an omnivorous reader," Yolen recalled. "I remember going to the library [so vividly]. Certainly there was a children's section but nobody discouraged me from trying other things—which I certainly did. I was I think eight years old . . . when I came across a beautiful two-volume boxed book [in my parents' library]. It was just a gorgeous book to touch and feel, so I started reading it. It was Thomas Mann's *Joseph in Egypt*. Probably most of it went right over my head, but I remember the touch of it and I read the whole thing. I just couldn't stop reading."

Yolen's love of reading soon led to a love of writing. She discovered at an early age that she had a knack for writing. To her, this seemed like the most logical thing in the world. "My mom and dad were both writers, and writers tend to hang around with other writers," she noted. "As a child, it was as if all the adult world was made up of writers. It was an assumption that when you grew up, you would be a writer."

EDUCATION

Yolen's mother wanted to be sure that her daughter attended a school that would help her talents grow. As a result, Yolen went to several different schools. "I was in half a dozen schools by second grade, both public and private, as mother looked for the best school for me," she recalled. When she finally settled into one school, Yolen showed her appetite for reading by finishing an entire textbook overnight. Her teachers recognized that she had a gift and advanced her to the second grade. In every grade, her teachers challenged her and pushed her to do her best work. It was not long before she was reading more advanced books. She went straight from children's picture books to the legends of King Arthur and the adventure stories of Robert Louis Stevenson. One of her particular favorites was Louisa May Alcott's novel *Little Women*.

Throughout her elementary school years, Yolen was a classroom star everywhere she went. She was elected class secretary three years in a row, and she relished the chance to be a student leader. She also had a strong interest in music. In the sixth grade, Yolen was accepted into Hunter, an exclusive all-girls' school. To her shock and surprise, when she reached Hunter she suddenly was no longer the star student. She found that she had to work extremely hard just to stay in the middle of the pack.

Despite her struggles in the classroom, however, Yolen continued to excel in writing and music. She wrote

> ***"[Attending Smith College] was a choice that would, all unknowingly, change my life. It made me aware of friendships possible—and impossible—with women. It created in me a longing for a particular countryside, that of New England. It charged me with a sense of leftsidedness, of an alien or changeling awareness. And it taught me, really, about poetry and literature and the written word."***

poetry and short stories, played the piano, sang, and danced ballet. In fact, she was one of the best students in her class at the prestigious Balanchine's American School of Ballet. Yolen wrote her first book during her time at Hunter—a 17-page "novel" about the American West. She also starred as Hansel in an all-girl presentation of "Hansel and Gretel."

When Yolen was 13, her family moved unexpectedly to Westport, Connecticut. She transferred to Bedford Junior High School, and then attended Staples High School. At Staples, Yolen not only participated in the school's musical and literary groups, but she also became captain of the girls' basketball team. She joined the Latin and Spanish clubs, acted as editor of the school newspaper, and spent one term as head of the Jewish Youth Group. Yolen became more serious about writing poetry in high school. She won a Scholastic Writing Award for a poem called "Death, You Do Not Frighten Me." She also won the school's English award her senior year and took first place in a contest called "I Speak for Democracy." Yolen graduated from Staples in 1956, finishing seventh in a class of 200 students.

College Years

After high school, Yolen originally hoped to attend Radcliffe, the sister college of Harvard University. But she ended up going to Smith, another women's college in Massachusetts. She later noted that attending Smith was an important step in her development as a writer: "[Attending Smith] was a choice that would, all unknowingly, change my life. It made me aware of friendships possible—and impossible—with women. It created in me a longing for a particular countryside, that of New England. It charged me with a sense of leftsidedness, of an alien or changeling awareness. And it taught me, really, about poetry and literature and the written word."

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Yolen studied poetry, English and Russian literature, and music at Smith. She was active in many campus groups, wrote a great deal of poetry, participated in musical theater productions, and began to take folk singing more seriously. During college, she served as an intern for the *Bridgeport Sunday Herald* newspaper and for the national magazine *Newsweek*. She also worked on the student news bureau at Smith. A man named Dudley Harmon was her advisor. Later, it would be his recommendation that would earn Yolen the interview that would start her writing career. Yolen graduated from Smith with a bachelor of arts degree in 1960.

CAREER HIGHLIGHTS

After her experiences in college, Yolen thought she wanted to be a journalist. As a young graduate, she first worked for *This Week* magazine and then for *Saturday Review*. When she was fired from her production job at the *Review*, she decided to try to make a living as a free-lance writer. Her first assignment was to help her father write his book, *The Young Sportsman's Guide to Kite Flying*.

With bills to pay and no interest in returning to journalism, Yolen took her first job in book publishing with Gold Medal Books in 1961. At about the same time, she was approached by Judith Jones, an editor at the Alfred A. Knopf publishing company. Jones had asked several advisors at Smith if any recent graduates were talented writers. Dudley Harmon had recommended Yolen.

Jones called Yolen and asked if she had a book-length manuscript ready to sell. Yolen panicked. She did not have a manuscript ready, but she did not want to miss her big break, either. So she lied and said she did have one ready. But when Jones asked her to come in so they could talk about it, Yolen was trapped in her lie. Thinking quickly, she decided that a children's book would be the quickest project she could pull together for Jones. In fact, she quickly wrote three picture books, which a friend illustrated.

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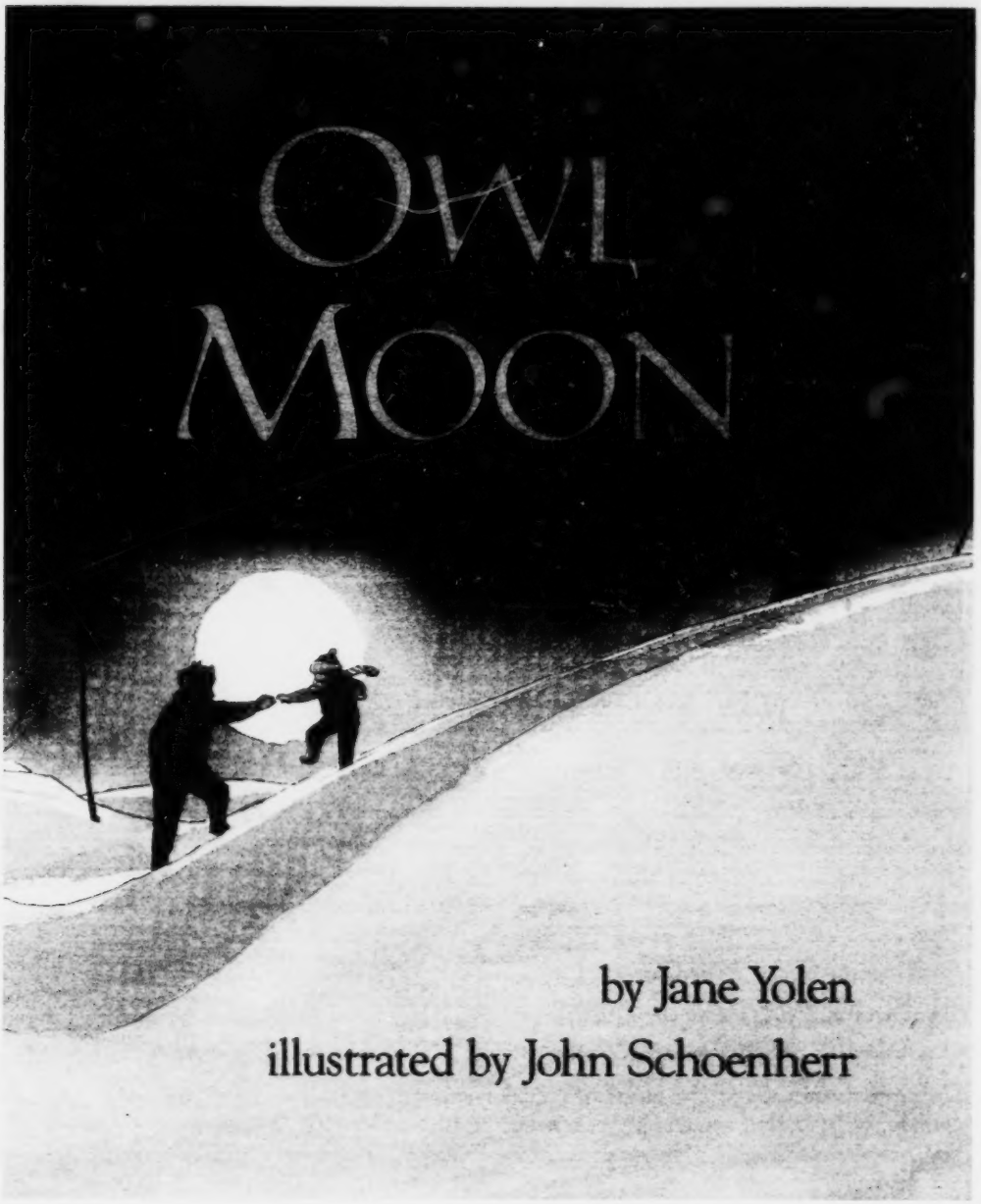

Jones was disappointed. She had expected a manuscript for a novel for adults, not a children's book. But she introduced Yolen to other influential people and encouraged her to keep trying. One of the people Yolen met was Rose Dobson, a children's book editor at David McKay Publishing Company. Dobson also turned down the manuscripts that Yolen had already completed, but she liked one of her ideas for a story about female pirates. Dobson took a chance on Yolen and agreed to publish what became her first book, *Pirates in Petticoats*, in 1963.

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After publishing a second book with Dobson called *See This Little Line?*, Yolen left Gold Medal and took a position as an associate editor at Rutledge Press, a small publishing company. Rutledge actually had the first chance to publish all of Yolen's books, but turned them down. At this point, she began looking for a new job. Surprisingly, she ended up at Alfred A. Knopf, where she worked as an assistant editor for three years.

During this time, Yolen got married. She had met her husband, David Stemple, while she was in college. As she became more and more successful publishing her children's stories over the next few years, her work as an author finally began to pay off financially. She and her husband were not rich, but they were secure enough to be able to afford to take nine months off and travel throughout Europe in a Volkswagen minivan. They left for Germany in August 1965 and spent time in France, Wales, Spain, England, and Italy. They also spent several weeks in Israel. It was on this trip that Yolen learned that she was pregnant for the first time. She and David returned to the United States, where their daughter Heidi was born; they later had two more children, Adam and Jason.

> ***"The minute I get an idea, I write it down and I put it in a file somewhere. I have enough ideas that if I never got another idea in my entire life, I could write for the next 20 years. And never getting another idea in my head is not an option—they just keep crowding in."***

Upon her return, Yolen learned that her agent had sold three more of her children's book manuscripts. This marked a turning point in her writing career. She would no longer have to work at a publishing house to support her writing. Instead, she could afford to work full-time as a free-lance writer. Several publishing houses would compete for the rights to publish her books. Around the time that she became a full-time professional writer, Yolen met the famous editor Ann Benaduce. She bought two of Yolen's manuscripts, and the two women became fast friends. Yolen calls Benaduce a "seminal influence in my writing life" and credits the editor with challenging her to expand into fairy tales and other areas. For her part, Benaduce referred to Yolen as "the American Hans Christian Andersen." Yolen went on to work with Benaduce on more than 30 books over the next 15 years.

A Popular and Award-Winning Writer

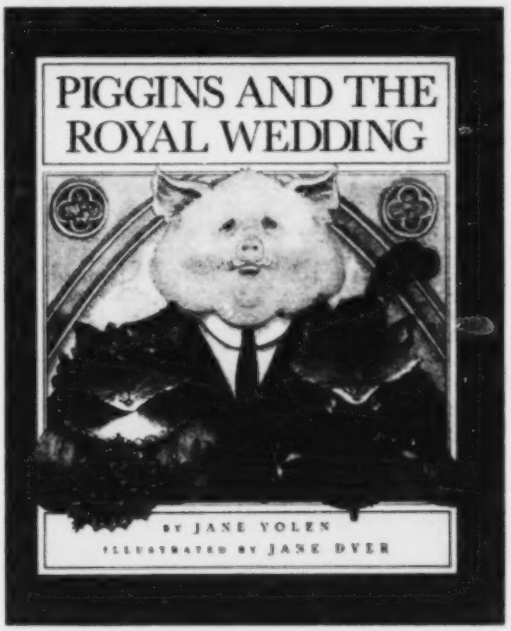
From the time her first books were published in the 1960s, Yolen went on to become one of the most productive and popular writers in the world. She has written more than 200 books for children, young adults, and adults. She has produced books in a number of genres, including fairy tales, folk tales, picture books, short stories, poetry, song books, and fantasy books for younger audiences, as well as fantasy and science fiction books for adults.

"The problem with writing is the cyclical nature of things. You send something out, and if it's accepted it comes back for revisions, just when you're into something else. You have to train yourself to know how to get back into a story and the only way I've ever found is by simply sitting down and reading it aloud."

Yolen's impressive list of works features more than 75 picture books, including *The Girl Who Loved the Wind, Merlin and the Dragons, The Seeing Stick,* and *Owl Moon,* which won the Caldecott Medal in 1988. She has also produced several poetry collections, among them *Dinosaur Dances, Dragon Night, Once Upon Snow,* and *Water Music.* In addition, Yolen is the author of 13 easy readers, including the *Commander Toad* series; 18 middle grade novels, including *And Twelve Chinese Acrobats* and the *Young Merlin* trilogy; a dozen young adult novels, including *A Sending of Dragons* and *Dragon's Blood;* and 20 story collections.

Although Yolen has written several acclaimed books for an adult audience, she is best known for her children's books. She entered the children's field by accident, but now she loves writing for young readers, even though she knows that they are a tough audience. She has said that there are three things authors must do to be successful in writing for children: "You have to be honest. You have to have some sort of way back to your own childhood, some kind of connection. I have very little memory of my actual childhood, but the emotions I felt as a child, I have a very clear sense of. (In some ways, I've kind of stuck around eight years old.) And the third thing is not to presume that just because you know a child, or have been a child, or once read a children's book, that you know enough to write children's books today. You need to be in touch with what's going on in that field." She added that "maybe the most important thing in any children's

book is to tell a story. Even if it's a poem, there has to be something for the child to say 'What happened next?'"



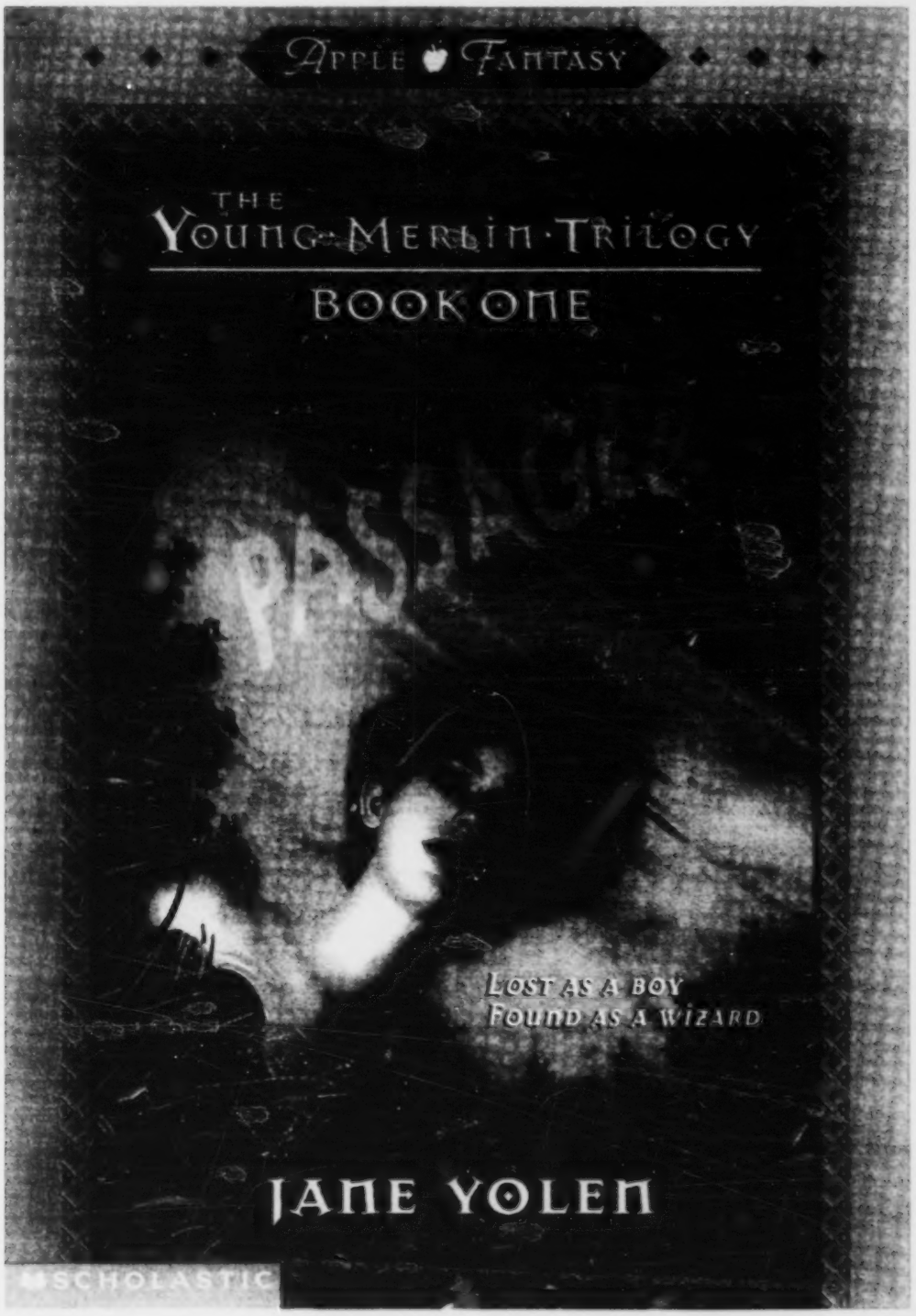
Dedicated to Her Craft

Yolen is a hard-working, productive, and prolific writer. She gets up at 6:30 every morning and starts her day by answering mail. After a quick shower and breakfast, she begins her writing for the day. She works eight to ten hours every day, with no vacations. Luckily, she has a constant stream of ideas to keep her busy. "The minute I get an idea, I write it down and I put it in a file somewhere," she noted. "I have enough ideas that if I never got another idea in my entire life, I could write for the next 20 years. And never getting another idea in my head is not an option — they just keep crowding in."

If a particularly strong idea hits Yolen, it is not uncommon for her to run up to her office in the middle of the night and type out a few pages. Once she has a first draft, she edits her work by hand several times, each time marking her changes in a different color ink. She always goes over her work repeatedly before she turns it in to her publisher.

Yolen's travels and the major events in her life are often reflected in her work. For instance, the book *The Girl Who Cried Flowers* was set in an olive grove in Greece that she and her husband had visited during their trip to Europe. In another case, she began writing the story *The Bird of Time* on the day her mother was diagnosed with cancer. The story reflected her desire to slow down the march of time.

Unlike many authors, Yolen does not work on one book at a time. In fact, she often juggles as many as 12 books at once. "Some of them are very much in the foreground and some of them are in the [background part of my brain]," she stated. "The problem with writing is the cyclical nature of things. You send something out, and if it's accepted it comes back for revisions, just when you're into something else. You have to train yourself to know how to get back into a story and the only way I've ever found is by simply sitting down and reading it aloud."



In fact, Yolen reads every story she writes aloud. "I write a sentence and then read it out loud before going on to the next. Then the paragraph is read aloud. Finally, the entire book is read and reread to the walls, to the

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bathtub, to the blank television, to my long-suffering husband," she noted. Perhaps as a result of reading her stories out loud, and because of her family history, Yolen is also well-known for her ability as a storyteller. "Not all stories that work well on the page work well orally, and vice versa," she explained. "As an oral storyteller, there is an immediate connection between yourself and your audience. When you're writing, you are your audience."

Even after writing 200 books, Yolen is still thrilled when a book turns out particularly well. "One of my greatest joys is when it comes right," she admitted. "I know I have skills, no question about it. I have worked hard, and I have talent. But that is no guarantee that any single story or poem or novel or book is going to work. So when I get to the end and it has worked, it is so exciting. I did it—I pulled it off once more."

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Second Career as an Editor

In addition to writing books herself, Yolen has always helped other writers. She has been involved with the Society of Children's Book Writers since the 1970s, and even served on the board of directors in its early days. She also holds workshops for new writers and tours the country speaking to children and teenagers. She has shown a commitment to writing and teaching that few other authors can match.

It is this commitment to writing that led Yolen back into the publishing world. In 1988, she began working as editor for Harcourt Brace Jovanovich. She became so successful as an editor that she had an imprint named after her. This special division of the larger publishing house, known as Jane Yolen Books, publishes fantasy and science fiction novels for children. Yolen handled the entire editing process for these books, from finding authors to editing the manuscripts. "I love doing this, but it takes a lot of time from my own writing," she admitted. "Now that I'm an editor, I hardly ever read for pleasure anymore—I'm just so tired of looking at words."

Books Ignite Controversy

One of the reasons Yolen continues to write children's books is her great concern for the pressures children face today. "I think we're growing them up too quickly," she stated. "Today they have to deal with death, AIDS, sex, drugs, family disintegration. When I was growing up in New York, nobody ever knew anyone who'd died. Now, my older kids both know someone who's been murdered by the time they were 18."

In recent years, Yolen has encountered some controversy involving her books. For example, several of her books featuring dragons or wizards have been banned for having "Satanic influences" or promoting devil worship. In 1994, she was involved in another controversy involving her book *Briar Rose*. This book is about the Holocaust, which occurred during World War II when members of the Nazi party in Germany murdered six million people of Jewish ancestry. It features a gay character who plays a heroic role in the story. An anti-gay group burned the book on the steps of the Board of Education building in Kansas City, Missouri. "I understand people wanting to protest when something threatens what they believe in. God knows I stood on enough protest lines over the years," Yolen stated. "But somehow burning books takes me right back to Nazi Germany. For me the line between burning books and burning ideas—and burning people—is a very mushy one."

> *"Basically, I've been very lucky and very blessed and covered in fairy dust. I just want to go on writing and discovering my stories for the rest of my life because I know that in my tales I make public what is private, transforming my own joy and sadness into tales for the people."*

Despite this controversy, Yolen feels that she has been blessed with a wonderful career. "Basically, I've been very lucky and very blessed and covered in fairy dust," she noted. "I just want to go on writing and discovering my stories for the rest of my life because I know that in my tales I make public what is private, transforming my own joy and sadness into tales for the people."

MARRIAGE AND FAMILY

Yolen met David Stemple in 1960 when he attended a party that she and two of her roommates were throwing. While the two did not hit it off im-

mediately, they slowly came to realize that they were meant for each other. After a two-year courtship, they were married in 1962. David works as the chairman of the computer science department at the University of Massachusetts. The couple has three children together: Heidi Elizabeth, Adam Douglas, and Jason Frederic.

Yolen enjoys spending time with her family and has worked with all three of her children. She has written seven books with Adam and five with Heidi. In addition, her son Jason, who is a photographer, took the pictures for her book *House, House*.

Yolen and her husband live in an old Victorian home called Phoenix Farm in Hatfield, Massachusetts. "It has three floors, and I work in the attic," she related. "Once upon a time, the very small room in the attic used to be the maid's quarters. It still has that very faded wallpaper, plus the remains of a system that was used to call her. It had no heat or air conditioning, so it was bitterly cold in the winter and hot in the summer."

During her travels, Yolen fell in love with Scotland. She and her husband recently purchased a second home there in the historic town of St. Andrews. "When I'm in Scotland, I get to write," she noted. "Nobody bothers me there. Nobody interviews me. Nobody asks me to give a speech. Nobody knows who I am. It's great. But I don't think it's possible for a writer to retire unless you no longer have anything to write. Unless you have absolutely nothing in your head."

HOBBIES AND OTHER INTERESTS

Yolen and her husband love to travel, especially to see their three grandchildren. Yolen also writes music in her free time, and she has penned songs for her son Adam's band and for folk-rock singer June Tabor. She also enjoys antiquing, going to movies, folksinging, storytelling, and being active in the fantasy writing community. She has served as a member of numerous influential literary organizations, including the Science Fiction Writers Association of America, the Society of Children's Book Writers, and the Children's Literature Association.

SELECTED WRITINGS

Fiction for Young Adults

The Magic Three of Solatia, 1974
The Gift of Sarah Barker, 1981
Dragon's Blood: A Fantasy, 1982

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Neptune Rising: Songs and Tales of the Undersea Folk, 1982
Heart's Blood, 1984
The Stone Silenus, 1984
Children of the Wolf, 1986
Spaceships and Spells, 1987
A Sending of Dragons, 1987
The Devil's Arithmetic, 1988
The Faery Flag: Stories and Poems of Fantasy and the Supernatural, 1989
The Dragon's Boy, 1992
Here There Be Dragons, 1993
Here There Be Unicorns, 1994
Here There Be Witches, 1995
Here There Be Angels, 1996
Passager: The Young Merlin Trilogy, Book One, 1996
Hobby: The Young Merlin Trilogy, Book Two, 1996
Welcome to the Sea of Sand, 1996
Twelve Impossible Things before Breakfast, 1997
Merlin: The Young Merlin Trilogy, Book Three, 1997
Welcome to the Ice House, 1998

Fiction for Children

Pirates in Petticoats, 1963
The Witch Who Wasn't, 1964
Gwinellen, the Princess Who Could Not Sleep, 1965
Trust a City Kid, 1966
The Emperor and the Kite, 1967
The Minstrel and the Mountain: A Tale of Peace, 1967
Robin Hood, 1967
Isabel's Noel, 1967
Greyling: A Picture Story from the Islands of Shetland, 1968
The Longest Name on the Block, 1968
The Wizard of Washington Square, 1969
The Inway Investigators; or, The Mystery at McCracken's Place, 1969
Hobo Toad and the Motorcycle Gang, 1970
The Seventh Mandarin, 1970
The Bird of Time, 1971
The Girl Who Loved the Wind, 1972
The Girl Who Cried Flowers and Other Tales, 1974
The Boy Who Had Wings, 1974
The Adventures of Eeka Mouse, 1974
The Rainbow Rider, 1974

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The Little Spotted Fish, 1975
The Transfigured Hart, 19785
Milkweed Days, 1976
The Moon Ribbon and Other Tales, 1976
The Seeing Stick, 1977
The Sultan's Perfect Tree, 1977
The Giants' Farm, 1977
The Hundredth Dove and Other Tales, 1977
Hannah Dreaming, 1977
Spider Jane, 1978
The Simple Prince, 1978
No Bath Tonight, 1978
The Mermaid's Three Wisdoms, 1978
Dream Weaver and Other Tales, 1978
The Giants Go Camping, 1979
Commander Toad in Space, 1980
Spider Jane on the Move, 1980
Mice on Ice, 1980
The Robot and Rebecca: The Mystery of the Code-Carrying Kids, 1980
Shirlick Holmes and the Case of the Wandering Wardrobe, 1981
The Robot and Rebecca and the Missing Owser, 1981
The Acorn Quest, 1981
Brothers of the Wind, 1981
Sleeping Ugly, 1981
The Boy Who Spoke Chimp, 1981
Uncle Lemon's Spring, 1981
Commander Toad and the Planet of the Grapes, 1982
Commander Toad and the Big Black Hole, 1983
Commander Toad and the Dis-Asteroid, 1985
Commander Toad and the Intergalactic Spy, 1986
Owl Moon, 1987
Commander Toad and the Space Pirates, 1987
Piggins, 1987
Picnic with Piggins, 1988
Piggins and the Royal Wedding, 1989
Dove Isabeau, 1989
Dream Weaver, 1989
Baby Bear's Bedtime Book, 1990
Sky Dogs, 1990
Tam Lin, 1990
Elfabet: An ABC of Elves, 1990
Letting Swift River Go, 1990

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Wizard's Hall, 1991
Eeny, Meeny, Miney Mole, 1992
Encounter, 1992
Hands, 1993
All Those Secrets of the World, 1993
Beneath the Ghost Moon, 1993
Grandad Bill's Song, 1993
Mouse's Birthday, 1993
Honkers, 1993
And Twelve Chinese Acrobats, 1994
Good Griselle, 1994
The Girl in the Golden Bower, 1994
Old Dame Counterpane, 1994
Little Mouse and Elephant: A Tale from Turkey, 1994
The Musicians of Bremen: A Tale from Germany, 1994
The Ballad of the Pirate Queens, 1995
Before the Storm, 1995
A Sip of Aesop, 1995
Merlin and the Dragons, 1995
The Wild Hunt, 1995
Meet the Monster, 1996
Nocturne, 1996
Wings, 1997
Child of Faerie, Child of Earth, 1997
Miz Berlin Walks, 1997
Commander Toad and the Voyage Home, 1997
The Sea Man, 1997
King Long Shanks, 1997
The Mystery of the Mary Celeste, 1998
Once Upon a Bedtime Story, 1998
The Book of Fairy Holidays, 1998

Poetry

See This Little Line?, 1963
It All Depends, 1970
An Invitation to the Butterfly Ball: A Counting Rhyme, 1976
All in the Woodland Early: An ABC Book, 1979
How Beastly! A Menagerie of Nonsense Poems, 1980
Dragon Night and Other Lullabies, 1980
Ring of Earth: A Child's Book of Seasons, 1986
The Three Bears Rhyme Book, 1987

Best Wishes: Poems for Halloween, 1989
Bird Watch, 1990
Dinosaur Dances, 1990
Raining Cats and Dogs, 1993
What Rhymes with Moon?, 1993
Sleep Rhymes around the World, 1993
Sacred Places, 1994
Animal Fare: Zoological Nonsense Poems, 1994
Three Bears Holiday Rhyme Book, 1995
Water Music: Poems for Children, 1995
Oh, Jerusalem, 1996
Sea Watch: A Book of Poetry, 1996
Once Upon Ice and Other Frozen Poems, 1997
The Originals, 1998

SELECTED HONORS AND AWARDS

Lewis Carroll Shelf Award: 1968, for *The Emperor and the Kite;* 1973, for *The Girl Who Loved the Wind*
Golden Kite Award (Society of Children's Book Writers): 1974, for *The Girl Who Cried Flowers and Other Tales*
Christopher Medal: 1978, for *The Seeing Stick*
Parents' Choice Award (Parents' Choice Foundation): 1982, for *Dragon's Blood;* 1984, for *The Stone Silenus;* 1989, for *Piggins* and *The Three Bears Rhyme Book*
Daedelus Award: 1986, for body of work in fantasy and short fiction
Jewish Book Council Award: 1988, for *The Devil's Arithmetic*
Kerlan Award: 1988, for achievements in children's literature
World Fantasy Award: 1988, for *Favorite Folktales from Around the World*
Regina Medal (Catholic Library Association): 1992, for body of work in children's literature
Maud Hart Lovelace Book Award: 1997, for *The Devil's Arithmetic*

FURTHER READING

Books

Authors and Artists for Young Adults, Vol. 22, 1997
Contemporary Authors New Revision Series, Vol. 56, 1997
Drew, Bernard A. *The 100 Most Popular Young Adult Authors: Biographical Sketches*, 1996
Gallo, Donald, ed. *Speaking for Ourselves: Autobiographical Sketches by Notable Authors of Books for Young Adults*, 1990

Hipple, Ted, ed. *Writers for Young Adults*, 1997
Roginski, James. *Behind the Covers*, 1985
Something about the Author, Vol. 75, 1994
Something about the Author Autobiography Series, Vol. 1, 1986
Silvey, Anita, ed. *Children's Books and Their Creators*, 1995
Twentieth Century Children's Writers, 1995
Who's Who in America, 2000

Periodicals

AARP Bulletin, July-Aug. 1998, p.1
Boston Globe Magazine, Apr. 14, 1996, p.16
Chicago Tribune, May 14, 1995, sec.6, p.9
Christian Science Monitor, Nov. 4, 1996, p.13
Early Years, Dec. 1983, p.22
Language Arts, May 1983, p.652
Storytelling, Jan. 1996, p.22
Washington Post, Dec. 7, 1986, p.4
The Writer, Jan. 1981, p.9; Mar. 1997, p.20
Writer's Digest, Mar. 1997, p. 31

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http://www.janeyolen.com
http://www.teacher.scholastic.com/writewit/myth/index.htm

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How to Use the Cumulative Index

Our indexes have a new look. In an effort to make our indexes easier to use, we've combined the Name and General Index into a new, cumulative General Index. This single ready-reference resource covers all the volumes in *Biography Today*, both the general series and the special subject series. The new General Index contains complete listings of all individuals who have appeared in *Biography Today* since the series began. Their names appear in bold-faced type, followed by the issue in which they appear. The General Index also includes references for the occupations, nationalities, and ethnic and minority origins of individuals profiled in *Biography Today*.

We have also made some changes to our specialty indexes, the Places of Birth Index and the Birthday Index. To consolidate and to save space, the Places of Birth Index and the Birthday Index will no longer appear in the January and April issues of the softbound subscription series. But these indexes can still be found in the September issue of the softbound subscription series, in the hardbound Annual Cumulation at the end of each year, and in each volume of the special subject series.

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Updates

Updated information on selected individuals appears in the Appendix at the end of the *Biography Today* Annual Cumulation. In the index, the original entry is listed first, followed by any updates.

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Howe, Gordie – *Floral, Saskatchewan* . . . . . Sport V.2
Jennings, Peter – *Toronto, Ontario* . . . . Jul 92
Johnston, Lynn – *Collingwood, Ontario* . . . . . Jan 99
Kielburger, Craig – *Toronto, Ontario* . . Jan 00
lang, k.d. – *Edmonton, Alberta* . . . . . Sep 93
Lemieux, Mario – *Montreal, Quebec* . . Jul 92
Martin, Bernard – *Petty Harbor, Newfoundland* . . . . . WorLdr V.3
Messier, Mark – *Edmonton, Alberta* . . Apr 96
Morissette, Alanis – *Ottawa, Ontario* Apr 97
Priestley, Jason – *Vancouver, British Columbia* . . . . . Apr 92
Shatner, William – *Montreal, Quebec* Apr 95
Twain, Shania – *Windsor, Ontario* . . . Apr 99
Vernon, Mike – *Calgary, Alberta* . . . . . Jan 98
Watson, Paul – *Toronto, Ontario* . . WorLdr V.1
Wolf, Hazel – *Victoria, British Columbia* . . . . . WorLdr V.3
Yzerman, Steve – *Cranbrook, British Columbia* . . . . . Sport V.2

China

Dai Qing – *Chongqing* . . . . . WorLdr V.3
Lucid, Shannon – *Shanghai* . . . . Science V.2
Paterson, Katherine – *Qing Jiang, Jiangsu* . . . . . Author 97
Pei, I.M. – *Canton* . . . . . Artist V.1
Wang, An – *Shanghai* . . . . . Science V.2

Colorado

Allen, Tim – *Denver* . . . . . Apr 94
Bryan, Zachery Ty – *Aurora* . . . . . Jan 97
Handler, Ruth – *Denver* . . . . . Apr 98
Stachowski, Richie – *Denver* . . . Science V.3
Toro, Natalia – *Boulder* . . . . . Sep 99
Van Dyken, Amy – *Englewood* . . . Sport V.3

Connecticut

Brandis, Jonathan – *Danbury* . . . . . Sep 95
dePaola, Tomie – *Meriden* . . . . . Author V.5
Land, Edwin – *Bridgeport* . . . . . Science V.1
Leibovitz, Annie – *Waterbury* . . . . . Sep 96
Lobo, Rebecca – *Hartford* . . . . . Sport V.3
McClintock, Barbara – *Hartford* . . . . . Oct 92
Spock, Benjamin – *New Haven* . . . . . Sep 95

Cuba

Castro, Fidel – *Mayari, Oriente* . . . . . Jul 92
Estefan, Gloria – *Havana* . . . . . Jul 92
Fuentes, Daisy – *Havana* . . . . . Jan 94
Hernandez, Livan – *Villa Clara* . . . . . Apr 98
Zamora, Pedro . . . . . Apr 95

Czechoslovakia

Albright, Madeleine – *Prague* . . . . . Apr 97
Hasek, Dominik – *Pardubice* . . . . . Sport V.3
Hingis, Martina – *Kosice* . . . . . Sport V.2
Navratilova, Martina – *Prague* . . . . . Jan 93

Dominican Republic

Sosa, Sammy – *San Pedro de Macoris* . . Jan 99

Egypt

Arafat, Yasir – *Cairo* . . . . . Sep 94
Boutros-Ghali, Boutros – *Cairo* . . . . . Apr 93
Sadat, Anwar – *Mit Abu al-Kum* . . . . . WorLdr V.2

England

Diana, Princess of Wales – *Norfolk* . . Jul 92; Jan 98
Goodall, Jane – *London* . . . . . Science V.1
Handford, Martin – *London* . . . . . Jan 92
Hargreaves, Alison – *Belper* . . . . . Jan 96
Hawking, Stephen – *Oxford* . . . . . Apr 92

Herriot, James – *Sunderland* . . . . Author V.1
Jacques, Brian – *Liverpool* . . . . . Author V.5
Leakey, Mary – *London* . . . . . Science V.1
Macaulay, David
– *Burton-on-Trent* . . . . . Author V.2
Moore, Henry – *Castleford* . . . . . Artist V.1
Reid Banks, Lynne – *London* . . . Author V.2
Rowling, J. K.– *Bristol* . . . . . Sep 99
Sacks, Oliver – *London* . . . . . Science V.3
Stewart, Patrick – *Mirfield* . . . . . Jan 94
Winslet, Kate – *Reading* . . . . . Sep 98

Ethiopia
Haile Selassie – *Ejarsa Goro, Harar* . . . . . WorLdr V.2
Roba, Fatuma – *Bokeji* . . . . . Sport V.3

Florida
Dorough, Howie – *Orlando* . . . . . Jan 00
Evert, Chris – *Ft. Lauderdale* . . . . . Sport V.1
McLean, A.J. – *West Palm Beach* . . . . . Jan 00
Reno, Janet – *Miami* . . . . . Sep 93
Richardson, Dot – *Orlando* . . . . . Sport V.2
Robinson, David – *Key West* . . . . . Sep 96
Sanders, Deion – *Ft. Myers* . . . . . Sport V.1
Smith, Emmitt – *Pensacola* . . . . . Sep 94
Tarvin, Herbert – *Miami* . . . . . Apr 97

France
Cousteau, Jacques – *St. Andre-de-Cubzac* . . . . . Jan 93
Ma, Yo-Yo – *Paris* . . . . . Jul 92

Georgia
Carter, Jimmy – *Plains* . . . . . Apr 95
Grant, Amy – *Augusta* . . . . . Jan 95
Hogan, Hulk – *Augusta* . . . . . Apr 92
Johns, Jasper – *Augusta* . . . . . Artist V.1
Lee, Spike – *Atlanta* . . . . . Apr 92
Robinson, Jackie – *Cairo* . . . . . Sport V.3
Thomas, Clarence – *Pin Point* . . . . . Jan 92
Ward, Charlie – *Thomasville* . . . . . Apr 94

Germany
Bethe, Hans A. – *Strassburg* . . . . Science V.3
Frank, Anne – *Frankfort* . . . . . Author V.4
Graf, Steffi – *Mannheim* . . . . . Jan 92
Pippig, Uta – *Berlin* . . . . . Sport V.1

Ghana
Annan, Kofi – *Kumasi* . . . . . Jan 98
Nkrumah, Kwame – *Nkrofro* . . . WorLdr V.2

Guatemala
Menchu, Rigoberta – *Chimel, El Quiche* . . . . . Jan 93

Haiti
Aristide, Jean-Bertrand – *Port-Salut* . . . Jan 95

Hawaii
Lowry, Lois – *Honolulu* . . . . . Author V.4
Tuttle, Merlin – *Honolulu* . . . . . Apr 97

Holland
Lionni, Leo – *Watergraafsmeer* . . . . . Author V.6

Hungary
Erdös, Paul – *Budapest* . . . . . Science V.2

Idaho
Street, Picabo – *Triumph* . . . . . Sport V.3

Illinois
Anderson, Gillian – *Chicago* . . . . . Jan 97
Blackmun, Harry – *Nashville* . . . . . Jan 00
Boyd, Candy Dawson – *Chicago* . Author V.3
Bradbury, Ray – *Waukegan* . . . . . Author V.3
Clinton, Hillary Rodham – *Chicago* . . Apr 93
Crawford, Cindy – *De Kalb* . . . . . Apr 93
Crichton, Michael – *Chicago* . . . . Author V.5
Cushman, Karen – *Chicago* . . . . Author V.5
Garth, Jennie – *Urbana* . . . . . Apr 96
Ford, Harrison – *Chicago* . . . . . Sep 97
Hansberry, Lorraine – *Chicago* . . Author V.5
Joyner-Kersee, Jackie – *East St. Louis* . . . . . Oct 92
Margulis, Lynn – *Chicago* . . . . . Sep 96
McCully, Emily Arnold – *Galesburg* . . Jul 92
Silverstein, Shel – *Chicago* . . . . . Author V.3
Siskel, Gene – *Chicago* . . . . . Sep 99
Watson, James D. – *Chicago* . . . Science V.1
Wrede, Patricia C. – *Chicago* . . . Author V.7

Indiana
Bird, Larry – *West Baden* . . . . . Jan 92
Davis, Jim – *Marion* . . . . . Author V.1
Letterman, David – *Indianapolis* . . . . Jan 95
Naylor, Phyllis Reynolds – *Anderson* Apr 93
Pauley, Jane – *Indianapolis* . . . . . Oct 92
Peet, Bill – *Grandview* . . . . . Author V.4
Vonnegut, Kurt – *Indianapolis* . . Author V.1

Iowa
Leopold, Aldo – *Burlington* . . . . WorLdr V.3

Iraq
Hussein, Saddam – *al-Auja* . . . . . Jul 92

Ireland, Northern
Lewis, C. S. – *Belfast* . . . . . Author V.3

Ireland, Republic of
Robinson, Mary – *Ballina* . . . . . Sep 93

Israel
Perlman, Itzhak – *Tel Aviv* . . . . . Jan 95
Portman, Natalie – *Jerusalem* . . . . . Sep 99
Rabin, Yitzhak – *Jerusalem* . . . . . Oct 92

Italy
Andretti, Mario – *Montona* . . . . . Sep 94
Krim, Mathilde – *Como* . . . . . Science V.1
Levi-Montalcini, Rita – *Turin* . . Science V.1
Jamaica
Ashley, Maurice – *St. Andrew* . . . . . Sep 99
Bailey, Donovan – *Manchester* . . . Sport V.2
Denton, Sandi – *Kingston* . . . . . Apr 95
Ewing, Patrick – *Kingston* . . . . . Jan 95
Maxwell, Jody-Anne – *St. Andrew* . . Sep 98
Japan
Suzuki, Shinichi – *Nagoya* . . . . . Sep 98
Uchida, Mitsuko – *Tokyo* . . . . . Apr 99
Jordan
Hussein, King – *Amman* . . . . . Apr 99
Kansas
Alley, Kirstie – *Wichita* . . . . . Jul 92
Brooks, Gwendolyn – *Topeka* . . . Author V.3
Dole, Bob – *Russell* . . . . . Jan 96
Parks, Gordon – *Fort Scott* . . . . . Artist V.1
Patrick, Ruth . . . . . Science V.3
Sanders, Barry – *Wichita* . . . . . Sep 95
Kentucky
Ali, Muhammad – *Louisville* . . . . . Sport V.2
Littrell, Brian – *Lexington* . . . . . Jan 00
Monroe, Bill – *Rosine* . . . . . Sep 97
Morgan, Garrett – *Paris* . . . . . Science V.2
Richardson, Kevin – *Lexington* . . . . . Jan 00
Kenya
Leakey, Louis – *Nairobi* . . . . . Science V.1
Kenyatta, Jomo – *Ngenda* . . . . . WorLdr V.2
Maathai, Wangari – *Nyeri* . . . . . WorLdr V.1
Ndeti, Cosmas – *Machakos* . . . . . Sep 95
Liberia
Tubman, William V. S.
– *Harper City* . . . . . WorLdr V.2
Libya
Qaddafi, Muammar . . . . . Apr 97
Louisiana
Dumars, Joe – *Natchitoches* . . . . . Sport V.3
Gumbel, Bryant – *New Orleans* . . . . . Apr 97
Marsalis, Wynton – *New Orleans* . . . Apr 92
Rice, Anne – *New Orleans* . . . . . Author V.3
Roberts, Cokie – *New Orleans* . . . . . Apr 95
Stewart, Kordell – *Marrero* . . . . . Sep 98
Macedonia
Teresa, Mother – *Skopje* . . . . . Apr 98
Maine
King, Stephen – *Portland* . . . . . Author V.1
Malawi
Banda, Hastings Kamuzu
– *Chiwengo, Nyasaland* . . . . . WorLdr V.2
Maryland
Hesse, Karen – *Baltimore* . . . . . Author V.5
Marshall, Thurgood – *Baltimore* . . . . . Jan 92
Ripken, Cal, Jr. – *Havre de Grace* . . Sport V.1
Massachusetts
Bush, George – *Milton* . . . . . Jan 92
Butcher, Susan – *Cambridge* . . . . . Sport V.1
Cormier, Robert – *Leominister* . . Author V.1
Gilbert, Walter – *Cambridge* . . . . Science V.2
Grandin, Temple – *Boston* . . . . . Science V.3
Guey, Wendy – *Boston* . . . . . Sep 96
Guy, Jasmine – *Boston* . . . . . Sep 93
Kerrigan, Nancy – *Woburn* . . . . . Apr 94
Krakauer, Jon – *Brookline* . . . . . Author V.6
Pine, Elizabeth Michele – *Boston* . . . . Jan 94
Scarry, Richard – *Boston* . . . . . Sep 94
Seuss, Dr. – *Springfield* . . . . . Jan 92
Speare, Elizabeth George – *Melrose* . Sep 95
Voigt, Cynthia – *Boston* . . . . . Oct 92
Walters, Barbara – *Boston* . . . . . Sep 94
Mexico
Rivera, Diego – *Guanajuato* . . . . . Artist V.1
Michigan
Applegate, K.A. . . . . Jan 00
Askins, Renee . . . . . WorLdr V.1
Curtis, Christopher Paul – *Flint* Author V.4
Galeczka, Chris – *Sterling Heights* . . . Apr 96
Johnson, Magic – *Lansing* . . . . . Apr 92
Krone, Julie – *Benton Harbor* . . . . . Jan 95
Lalas, Alexi – *Royal Oak* . . . . . Sep 94
Shabazz, Betty – *Detroit* . . . . . Apr 98
Van Allsburg, Chris – *Grand Rapids* . . Apr 92
Winans, CeCe – *Detroit* . . . . . Apr 00
Minnesota
Burger, Warren – *St. Paul* . . . . . Sep 95
Douglas, Marjory Stoneman
– *Minneapolis* . . . . . WorLdr V.1
Madden, John – *Austin* . . . . . Sep 97
Murie, Olaus J. . . . . WorLdr V.1
Paulsen, Gary – *Minneapolis* . . . Author V.1
Ryder, Winona – *Winona* . . . . . Jan 93
Schulz, Charles – *Minneapolis* . . Author V.2
Scurry, Briana – *Minneapolis* . . . . . Jan 00
Ventura, Jesse – *Minneapolis* . . . . . Apr 99
Winfield, Dave – *St. Paul* . . . . . Jan 93
Mississippi
Brandy – *McComb* . . . . . Apr 96
Favre, Brett – *Gulfport* . . . . . Sport V.2

Jones, James Earl – *Arkabutla Township* . . . . . Jan 95
McCarty, Oseola – *Wayne County* . . . Jan 99
Payton, Walter – *Columbia* . . . . . Jan 00
Rice, Jerry – *Crawford* . . . . . Apr 93
Rimes, LeAnn – *Jackson* . . . . . Jan 98
Taylor, Mildred D. – *Jackson* . . . . Author V.1
Winfrey, Oprah – *Kosciusko* . . . . . Apr 92
Wright, Richard – *Natchez* . . . . . Author V.5

Missouri
Angelou, Maya – *St. Louis* . . . . . Apr 93
Champagne, Larry III – *St. Louis* . . . . Apr 96
Goodman, John – *Affton* . . . . . Sep 95
Heinlein, Robert – *Butler* . . . . . Author V.4
Hughes, Langston – *Joplin* . . . . . Author V.7
Lester, Julius – *St. Louis* . . . . . Author V.7
Limbaugh, Rush – *Cape Girardeau* . . Sep 95
Miller, Shannon – *Rolla* . . . . . Sep 94

Montana
Carvey, Dana – *Missoula* . . . . . Jan 93
Horner, Jack – *Shelby* . . . . . Science V.1

Morocco
Hassan II – *Rabat* . . . . . WorLdr V.2

Myanmar
see Burma

Nevada
Agassi, Andre – *Las Vegas* . . . . . Jul 92

New Jersey
Blume, Judy . . . . . Jan 92
Carpenter, Mary Chapin – *Princeton* . . . . . Sep 94
Earle, Sylvia – *Gibbstown* . . . . . Science V.1
Glover, Savion – *Newark* . . . . . Apr 99
Gwaltney, John Langston – *Orange* . . . . . Science V.3
Hill, Lauryn – *South Orange* . . . . . Sep 99
Houston, Whitney – *Newark* . . . . . Sep 94
Ice-T – *Newark* . . . . . Apr 93
Lawrence, Jacob – *Atlantic City* . . Artist V.1
Love, Susan – *Long Branch* . . . . Science V.3
Martin, Ann M. – *Princeton* . . . . . Jan 92
O'Neal, Shaquille – *Newark* . . . . . Sep 93
Pinsky, Robert – *Long Branch* . . Author V.7
Queen Latifah – *Newark* . . . . . Apr 92
Rodman, Dennis – *Trenton* . . . . . Apr 96
Schwarzkopf, H. Norman – *Trenton* . . Jan 92
Sinatra, Frank – *Hoboken* . . . . . Jan 99
Thomas, Dave – *Atlantic City* . . . . . Apr 96

New Mexico
Foreman, Dave – *Albuquerque* . . . WorLdr V.1

New York State
Abdul-Jabbar, Kareem – *New York City* . . . . . Sport V.1
Abzug, Bella – *Bronx* . . . . . Sep 98
Aguilera, Christina – *Staten Island* . . Apr 00
Avi – *New York City* . . . . . Jan 93
Baldwin, James – *New York City* . Author V.2
Blair, Bonnie – *Cornwall* . . . . . Apr 94
Bourke-White, Margaret – *New York City* . . . . . Artist V.1
Brody, Jane – *Brooklyn* . . . . . Science V.2
Burke, Chris – *New York City* . . . . . Sep 93
Burns, Ken – *Brooklyn* . . . . . Jan 95
Bush, Barbara – *New York City* . . . . . Jan 92
Calderone, Mary S. – *New York City* . . . . . Science V.3
Carey, Mariah – *New York City* . . . . . Apr 96
Carle, Eric – *Syracuse* . . . . . Author V.1
Carter, Nick – *Jamestown* . . . . . Jan 00
Cohen, Adam Ezra – *New York City* Apr 97
Combs, Sean (Puff Daddy) – *New York City* . . . . . Apr 98
Cooney, Caroline B. – *Geneva* . . . Author V.4
Cronin, John – *Yonkers* . . . . . WorLdr V.3
Culkin, Macaulay – *New York City* . . Sep 93
Danes, Claire – *New York City* . . . . . Sep 97
de Mille, Agnes – *New York City* . . . . Jan 95
Duchovny, David – *New York City* . . Apr 96
Farrakhan, Louis – *Bronx* . . . . . Jan 97
Frankenthaler, Helen – *New York City* . . . . . Artist V.1
Gellar, Sarah Michelle – *New York City* . . . . . Jan 99
Giff, Patricia Reilly – *Queens* . . . . Author V.7
Ginsburg, Ruth Bader – *Brooklyn* . . . . Jan 94
Goldberg, Whoopi – *New York City* . . . . . Apr 94
Gould, Stephen Jay – *New York City* . . . . . Science V.2
Haley, Alex – *Ithaca* . . . . . Apr 92
Hart, Melissa Joan – *Smithtown* . . . . . Jan 94
Healy, Bernadine – *Queens* . . . . Science V.1
James, Cheryl – *New York City* . . . . . Apr 95
Jordan, Michael – *Brooklyn* . . . . . Jan 92
Kerr, M.E. – *Auburn* . . . . . Author V.1
Konigsburg, E.L. – *New York City* . . . . . Author V.3
Kurzweil, Raymond – *New York City* . . . . . Science V.2
Lee, Stan – *New York City* . . . . . Author V.7

Lemelson, Jerome – *Staten Island* . . . . . Science V.3
L'Engle, Madeleine – *New York City* . . Jan 92
Leno, Jay – *New Rochelle* . . . . . Jul 92
Lewis, Shari – *New York City* . . . . . Jan 99
Mittermeier, Russell A. – *New York City* . . . . . WorLdr V.1
Moses, Grandma – *Greenwich* . . . Artist V.1
Moss, Cynthia – *Ossining* . . . . . WorLdr V.3
O'Donnell, Rosie – *Commack* . . . . . Apr 97
Oppenheimer, J. Robert – *New York City* . . . . . Science V.1
Pascal, Francine – *New York City* . . . . . Author V.6
Peterson, Roger Tory – *Jamestown* . . . . . WorLdr V.1
Pike, Christopher – *Brooklyn* . . . . . Sep 96
Powell, Colin – *New York City* . . . . . Jan 92
Prelutsky, Jack – *Brooklyn* . . . . . Author V.2
Reeve, Christopher – *Manhattan* . . . . Jan 97
Ringgold, Faith – *New York City* . Author V.2
Rockwell, Norman – *New York City* . . . . . Artist V.1
Roper, Dee Dee – *New York City* . . . . Apr 95
Sachar, Louis – *East Meadow* . . . Author V.6
Sagan, Carl – *Brooklyn* . . . . . Science V.1
Salinger, J.D. – *New York City* . . Author V.2
Salk, Jonas – *New York City* . . . . . Jan 94
Sealfon, Rebecca – *New York City* . . . Sep 97
Seinfeld, Jerry – *Brooklyn* . . . . . Oct 92
Sendak, Maurice – *Brooklyn* . . . . Author V.2
Shakur, Tupac – *Bronx* . . . . . Apr 97
Strasser, Todd – *New York City* . . Author V.7
Washington, Denzel – *Mount Vernon* . . . . . Jan 93
Wayans, Keenen Ivory – *New York City* . . . . . Jan 93
White, E.B. – *Mount Vernon* . . . . Author V.1
Williams, Garth – *New York City* . Author V.2
Yolen, Jane – *New York City* . . . . Author V.7
Zindel, Paul – *Staten Island* . . . . . Author V.1

New Zealand

Hillary, Sir Edmund – *Auckland* . . . . Sep 96

Nigeria

Olajuwon, Hakeem – *Lagos* . . . . . Sep 95
Saro-Wiwa, Ken – *Bori, Rivers State* . . . . . WorLdr V.1

North Carolina

Bearden, Romare – *Charlotte* . . . . . Artist V.1
Byars, Betsy – *Charlotte* . . . . . Author V.4
Chavis, Benjamin – *Oxford* . . . . . Jan 94
Delany, Bessie – *Raleigh* . . . . . Sep 99
Dole, Elizabeth Hanford – *Salisbury* . . Jul 92
Petty, Richard – *Level Cross* . . . . . Sport V.2
Williamson, Kevin – *New Bern* . . Author V.6

Norway

Brundtland, Gro Harlem – *Baerum* . . . . . Science V.3

Ohio

Anderson, Terry – *Lorain* . . . . . Apr 92
Battle, Kathleen – *Portsmouth* . . . . . Jan 93
Berry, Halle – *Cleveland* . . . . . Jan 95
Creech, Sharon – *Mayfield Heights* . . . . . Author V.5
Dove, Rita – *Akron* . . . . . Jan 94
Draper, Sharon – *Cleveland* . . . . . Apr 99
Glenn, John – *Cambridge* . . . . . Jan 99
Guisewite, Cathy – *Dayton* . . . . . Sep 93
Hamilton, Virginia – *Yellow Springs* . . . . . Author V.1
Hampton, David . . . . . Apr 99
Harbaugh, Jim – *Toledo* . . . . . Sport V.3
Holmes, Katie – *Toledo* . . . . . Jan 00
Lin, Maya – *Athens* . . . . . Sep 97
Lovell, Jim – *Cleveland* . . . . . Jan 96
Morrison, Toni – *Lorain* . . . . . Jan 94
Nicklaus, Jack – *Columbus* . . . . . Sport V.2
Perry, Luke – *Mansfield* . . . . . Jan 92
Rose, Pete – *Cincinnati* . . . . . Jan 92
Shula, Don – *Grand River* . . . . . Apr 96
Spielberg, Steven – *Cincinnati* . . . . . Jan 94
Steinem, Gloria – *Toledo* . . . . . Oct 92
Stine, R.L. – *Columbus* . . . . . Apr 94
Tompkins, Douglas – *Conneaut* . . . . . WorLdr V.3
Woodson, Jacqueline – *Columbus* . . . . . Author V.7

Oklahoma

Brooks, Garth – *Tulsa* . . . . . Oct 92
Duke, David – *Tulsa* . . . . . Apr 92
Ellison, Ralph – *Oklahoma City* . . Author V.3
Hanson, Ike – *Tulsa* . . . . . Jan 98
Hanson, Taylor – *Tulsa* . . . . . Jan 98
Hanson, Zac – *Tulsa* . . . . . Jan 98
Hill, Anita – *Morris* . . . . . Jan 93
Hinton, S.E. – *Tulsa* . . . . . Author V.1
Mankiller, Wilma – *Tahlequah* . . . . . Apr 94
Mantle, Mickey – *Spavinaw* . . . . . Jan 96
McEntire, Reba – *McAlester* . . . . . Sep 95
Pitt, Brad – *Shawnee* . . . . . Sep 98

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Oregon
Cleary, Beverly – *McMinnville* . . . . . Apr 94
Groening, Matt – *Portland* . . . . . Jan 92
Harding, Tonya – *Portland* . . . . . Sep 94
Hooper, Geoff – *Salem* . . . . . Jan 94
Pauling, Linus – *Portland* . . . . . Jan 95
Phoenix, River – *Madras* . . . . . Apr 94
Schroeder, Pat – *Portland* . . . . . Jan 97
Pakistan
Bhutto, Benazir – *Karachi* . . . . . Apr 95
Masih, Iqbal . . . . . Jan 96
Palestine
Perlman, Itzhak – *Tel Aviv* . . . . . Jan 95
Rabin, Yitzhak – *Jerusalem* . . . . . Oct 92
Panama
McCain, John – *Panama Canal Zone* . . . . . Apr 00
Pennsylvania
Abbey, Edward – *Indiana* . . . . . WorLdr V.1
Alexander, Lloyd – *Philadelphia* . Author V.6
Anderson, Marian – *Philadelphia* . . . . Jan 94
Berenstain, Jan – *Philadelphia* . . Author V.2
Berenstain, Stan – *Philadelphia* . Author V.2
Bradley, Ed – *Philadelphia* . . . . . Apr 94
Bryant, Kobe – *Philadelphia* . . . . . Apr 99
Calder, Alexander – *Lawnton* . . . . Artist V.1
Carson, Rachel – *Springdale* . . . WorLdr V.1
Cosby, Bill . . . . . Jan 92
Diemer, Walter – *Philadelphia* . . . . . Apr 98
Duncan, Lois – *Philadelphia* . . . . . Sep 93
Gingrich, Newt – *Harrisburg* . . . . . Apr 95
Griffey, Ken, Jr. – *Donora* . . . . . Sport V.1
Iacocca, Lee A. – *Allentown* . . . . . Jan 92
Jamison, Judith – *Philadelphia* . . . . . Jan 96
Lipinski, Tara – *Philadelphia* . . . . . Apr 98
Marino, Dan – *Pittsburgh* . . . . . Apr 93
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1	Salinger, J.D.	1919
2	Asimov, Isaac	1920
4	Naylor, Phyllis Reynolds	1933
	Shula, Don	1930
7	Hurston, Zora Neale	?1891
	Rodriguez, Eloy	1947
8	Hawking, Stephen W.	1942
9	McLean, A.J.	1978
	Menchu, Rigoberta	1959
	Nixon, Richard	1913
11	Leopold, Aldo	1887
12	Limbaugh, Rush	1951
14	Lucid, Shannon	1943
15	Werbach, Adam	1973
16	Fossey, Dian	1932
17	Carrey, Jim	1962
	Cormier, Robert	1925
	Jones, James Earl	1931
	Lewis, Shari	?1934
18	Ali, Muhammad	1942
	Messier, Mark	1961
19	Askins, Renee	1959
	Johnson, John	1918
21	Domingo, Placido	1941
	Nicklaus, Jack	1940
	Olajuwon, Hakeem	1963
22	Chavis, Benjamin	1948
23	Thiessen, Tiffani-Amber	1974
25	Alley, Kirstie	1955
26	Siskel, Gene	1946
27	Lester, Julius	1939
28	Carter, Nick	1980
	Gretzky, Wayne	1961
29	Abbey, Edward	1927
	Gilbert, Sara	1975
	Hasek, Dominik	1965
	Peet, Bill	1915
	Winfrey, Oprah	1954
30	Alexander, Lloyd	1924
31	Robinson, Jackie	1919
	Ryan, Nolan	1947

February		Year
1	Hughes, Langston	1902
	Spinelli, Jerry	1941
	Yeltsin, Boris	1931
3	Nixon, Joan Lowery	1927
	Rockwell, Norman	1894
4	Parks, Rosa	1913
5	Aaron, Hank	1934
6	Leakey, Mary	1913
	Rosa, Emily	1987
	Zmeskal, Kim	1976
7	Brooks, Garth	1962
	Wang, An	1920
	Wilder, Laura Ingalls	1867
8	Grisham, John	1955
9	Love, Susan	1948
10	Konigsburg, E.L.	1930
	Norman, Greg	1955
11	Aniston, Jennifer	1969
	Brandy	1979
	Yolen, Jane	1939
12	Blume, Judy	1938
	Kurzweil, Raymond	1948
	Woodson, Jacqueline	?1964
15	Groening, Matt	1954
	Van Dyken, Amy	1973
17	Anderson, Marian	1897
	Hargreaves, Alison	1962
	Jordan, Michael	1963
18	Morrison, Toni	1931
20	Adams, Ansel	1902
	Barkley, Charles	1963
	Cobain, Kurt	1967
	Crawford, Cindy	1966
	Hernandez, Livan	1975
	Littrell, Brian	1975
21	Carpenter, Mary Chapin	1958
	Jordan, Barbara	1936
	Mugabe, Robert	1924
24	Jobs, Steven	1955
	Vernon, Mike	1963
	Whitestone, Heather	1973

February (continued)		Year
25	Voigt, Cynthia	1942
27	Clinton, Chelsea	1980
	Hunter-Gault, Charlayne	1942
28	Andretti, Mario	1940
	Pauling, Linus	1901

March		Year
1	Ellison, Ralph Waldo	1914
	Murie, Olaus J.	1889
	Rabin, Yitzhak	1922
	Zamora, Pedro	1972
2	Gorbachev, Mikhail	1931
	Satcher, David	1941
	Seuss, Dr.	1904
3	Hooper, Geoff	1979
	Joyner-Kersee, Jackie	1962
	MacLachlan, Patricia	1938
4	Morgan, Garrett	1877
5	Margulis, Lynn	1938
6	Ashley, Maurice	1966
7	McCarty, Oseola	1908
8	Prinze, Freddie Jr.	1976
10	Guy, Jasmine	1964
	Miller, Shannon	1977
	Wolf, Hazel	1898
12	Hamilton, Virginia	1936
13	Van Meter, Vicki	1982
14	Dayne, Ron	1977
	Hanson, Taylor	1983
	Williamson, Kevin	1965
15	Ginsburg, Ruth Bader	1933
16	O'Neal, Shaquille	1972
17	Hamm, Mia	1972
	Nureyev, Rudolf	1938
18	Blair, Bonnie	1964
	de Klerk, F.W.	1936
	Queen Latifah	1970
19	Blanchard, Rachel	1976
20	Lee, Spike	1957
	Lowry, Lois	1937
	Sachar, Louis	1954
21	Gilbert, Walter	1932
	O'Donnell, Rosie	1962
22	Shatner, William	1931
25	Lovell, Jim	1928
	Steinem, Gloria	1934
	Swoopes, Sheryl	1971
26	Allen, Marcus	1960
	Erdös, Paul	1913
	O'Connor, Sandra Day	1930
	Stockton, John	1962
27	Carey, Mariah	1970
	Wrede, Patricia C.	1953
28	James, Cheryl	
	McEntire, Reba	1955
	Tompkins, Douglas	1943
30	Dion, Celine	1968
	Hammer	1933
31	Chavez, Cesar	1927
	Gore, Al	1948
	Howe, Gordie	1928

April		Year
1	Maathai, Wangari	1940
2	Carvey, Dana	1955
3	Garth, Jennie	1972
	Goodall, Jane	1934
	Street, Picabo	1971
4	Angelou, Maya	1928
5	Powell, Colin	1937
6	Watson, James D.	1928
7	Dougals, Marjory Stoneman	1890
8	Annan, Kofi	1938
10	Madden, John	1936
12	Cleary, Beverly	1916
	Danes, Claire	1979
	Doherty, Shannen	1971
	Letterman, David	1947
	Soto, Gary	1952
13	Brandis, Jonathan	1976
	Henry, Marguerite	1902
14	Gellar, Sarah Michelle	1977
	Maddux, Greg	1966
	Rose, Pete	1941
15	Martin, Bernard	1954
16	Abdul-Jabbar, Kareem	1947
	Selena	1971
	Williams, Garth	1912
17	Champagne, Larry III	1985
18	Hart, Melissa Joan	1976
20	Brundtland, Gro Harlem	1939
21	Muir, John	1838
22	Levi-Montalcini, Rita	1909
	Oppenheimer, J. Robert	1904
25	Fitzgerald, Ella	1917
26	Giff, Patricia Reilly	1935
	Pei, I.M.	1917
27	Wilson, August	1945
28	Baker, James	1930
	Duncan, Lois	1934
	Hussein, Saddam	1937
	Kaunda, Kenneth	1924
	Leno, Jay	1950

April (continued)		Year
29	Agassi, Andre	1970
	Seinfeld, Jerry	1954

May		Year
2	Spock, Benjamin	1903
5	Lionni, Leo	1910
	Maxwell, Jody-Anne	1986
	Strasser, Todd	1950
7	Land, Edwin	1909
9	Bergen, Candice	1946
	Yzerman, Steve	1965
10	Cooney, Caroline B.	1947
	Curtis, Christopher Paul	1953
	Jamison, Judith	1944
11	Farrakhan, Louis	1933
13	Pascal, Francine	1938
	Rodman, Dennis	1961
14	Lucas, George	1944
	Smith, Emmitt	1969
15	Albright, Madeleine	1937
	Johns, Jasper	1930
	Zindel, Paul	1936
17	Paulsen, Gary	1939
18	John Paul II	1920
19	Brody, Jane	1941
	Hansberry, Lorraine	1930
21	Robinson, Mary	1944
23	Bardeen, John	1908
	Jewel	1974
	O'Dell, Scott	1898
24	Dumars, Joe	1963
26	Hill, Lauryn	1975
	Ride, Sally	1951
27	Carson, Rachel	1907
	Kerr, M.E.	1927
28	Johnston, Lynn	1947
	Shabazz, Betty	1936
30	Cohen, Adam Ezra	1979

June		Year
1	Lalas, Alexi	1970
	Morissette, Alanis	1974
4	Kistler, Darci	1964
	Nelson, Gaylord	1916
5	Scarry, Richard	1919
6	Rylant, Cynthia	1954
7	Brooks, Gwendolyn	1917
	Oleynik, Larisa	1981
8	Bush, Barbara	1925
	Edelman, Marian Wright	1939
	Wayans, Keenen Ivory	1958
	Wright, Frank Lloyd	1869
9	Portman, Natalie	1981
10	Frank, Anne	1929
	Lipinski, Tara	1982
	Sendak, Maurice	1928
11	Cousteau, Jacques	1910
	Montana, Joe	1956
12	Bush, George	1924
13	Allen, Tim	1953
	Alvarez, Luis W.	1911
	Christo	1935
14	Bourke-White, Margaret	1904
	Graf, Steffi	1969
	Summitt, Pat	1952
	Yep, Laurence	1948
15	Horner, Jack	1946
	Jacques, Brian	1939
16	McClintock, Barbara	1902
	Shakur, Tupac	1971
17	Gingrich, Newt	1943
	Jansen, Dan	1965
	Williams, Venus	1980
18	Johnson, Angela	1961
	Morris, Nathan	1971
	Van Allsburg, Chris	1949
19	Abdul, Paula	1962
	Aung San Suu Kyi	1945
20	Goodman, John	1952
21	Bhutto, Benazir	1953
	Breathed, Berke	1957
22	Bradley, Ed	1941
	Daly, Carson	1973
23	Rudolph, Wilma	1940
	Thomas, Clarence	1948
25	Carle, Eric	1929
	Gibbs, Lois	1951
26	Harris, Bernard	1956
	LeMond, Greg	1961
27	Babbitt, Bruce	1938
	Perot, H. Ross	1930
28	Elway, John	1960

July		Year
1	Brower, David	1912
	Calderone, Mary S.	1904
	Diana, Princess of Wales	1961
	Duke, David	1950
	Lewis, Carl	1961
	McCully, Emily Arnold	1939

July (continued)		Year
2	Bethe, Hans A.	1906
	George, Jean Craighead	1919
	Marshall, Thurgood	1908
	Petty, Richard	1937
	Thomas, Dave	1932
5	Watterson, Bill	1958
6	Dalai Lama	1935
	Dumitriu, Ioana	1976
7	Chagall, Marc	1887
	Heinlein, Robert	1907
	Kwan, Michelle	1980
	Stachowski, Richie	1985
8	Hardaway, Anfernee "Penny"	1971
	Sealfon, Rebecca	1983
9	Farmer, Nancy	1941
	Hanks, Tom	1956
	Hassan II	1929
	Krim, Mathilde	1926
	Sacks, Oliver	1933
10	Ashe, Arthur	1943
	Boulmerka, Hassiba	1969
11	Cisneros, Henry	1947
	White, E.B.	1899
12	Cosby, Bill	1937
	Johnson, Johanna	1983
	Yamaguchi, Kristi	1972
13	Ford, Harrison	1942
	Stewart, Patrick	1940
15	Aristide, Jean-Bertrand	1953
	Ventura, Jesse	1951
16	Johnson, Jimmy	1943
	Sanders, Barry	1968
18	Glenn, John	1921
	Lemelson, Jerome	1923
	Mandela, Nelson	1918
19	Tarvin, Herbert	1985
20	Hillary, Sir Edmund	1919
21	Reno, Janet	1938
	Williams, Robin	1952
22	Calder, Alexander	1898
	Dole, Bob	1923
	Hinton, S.E.	1948
23	Haile Selassie	1892
24	Abzug, Bella	1920
	Krone, Julie	1963
	Moss, Cynthia	1940
	Wilson, Mara	1987
25	Payton, Walter	1954
26	Berenstain, Jan	1923
28	Davis, Jim	1945
29	Burns, Ken	1953
	Creech, Sharon	1945
	Dole, Elizabeth Hanford	1936
	Jennings, Peter	1938
	Morris, Wanya	1973
30	Hill, Anita	1956
	Moore, Henry	1898
	Schroeder, Pat	1940
31	Cronin, John	1950
	Reid Banks, Lynne	1929
	Rowling, J. K.	1965

August		Year
1	Brown, Ron	1941
	Coolio	1963
	Garcia, Jerry	1942
2	Baldwin, James	1924
	Healy, Bernadine	1944
3	Roper, Dee Dee	
	Savimbi, Jonas	1934
4	Gordon, Jeff	1971
5	Ewing, Patrick	1962
	Jackson, Shirley Ann	1946
6	Robinson, David	1965
	Warhol, Andy	?1928
7	Byars, Betsy	1928
	Duchovny, David	1960
	Leakey, Louis	1903
8	Boyd, Candy Dawson	1946
9	Anderson, Gillian	1968
	Houston, Whitney	1963
	McKissack, Patricia C.	1944
	Sanders, Deion	1967
	Travers, P.L.	?1899
11	Haley, Alex	1921
	Hogan, Hulk	1953
12	Martin, Ann M.	1955
	McKissack, Fredrick L.	1939
	Myers, Walter Dean	1937
	Sampras, Pete	1971
13	Battle, Kathleen	1948
	Castro, Fidel	1927
14	Berry, Halle	?1967
	Johnson, Magic	1959
	Larson, Gary	1950
15	Affleck, Benjamin	1972
	Ellerbee, Linda	1944

August (continued)		Year
18	Danziger, Paula	1944
	Murie, Margaret	1902
19	Clinton, Bill	1946
	Soren, Tabitha	1967
20	Chung, Connie	1946
	Milosevic, Slobodan	1941
21	Draper, Sharon	1952
	Toro, Natalia	1984
22	Bradbury, Ray	1920
	Dorough, Howie	1973
	Schwarzkopf, H. Norman	1934
23	Bryant, Kobe	1978
	Novello, Antonia	1944
	Phoenix, River	1970
24	Arafat, Yasir	1929
	Dai Qing	1941
	Ripken, Cal, Jr.	1960
26	Burke, Christopher	1965
	Culkin, Macaulay	1980
	Sabin, Albert	1906
	Teresa, Mother	1910
	Tuttle, Merlin	1941
27	Nechita, Alexandra	1985
28	Dove, Rita	1952
	Evans, Janet	1971
	Peterson, Roger Tory	1908
	Priestley, Jason	1969
	Rimes, LeAnn	1982
	Twain, Shania	1965
29	Grandin, Temple	1947
	Hesse, Karen	1952
	McCain, John	1936
30	Earle, Sylvia	1935
31	Perlman, Itzhak	1945

September		Year
1	Estefan, Gloria	1958
2	Bearden, Romare	?1912
	Galeczka, Chris	1981
3	Delany, Bessie	1891
4	Wright, Richard	1908
5	Guisewite, Cathy	1950
7	Lawrence, Jacob	1917
	Moses, Grandma	1860
	Pippig, Uta	1965
	Scurry, Briana	1971
8	Prelutsky, Jack	1940
	Thomas, Jonathan Taylor	1982
10	Gould, Stephen Jay	1941
13	Johnson, Michael	1967
	Monroe, Bill	1911
	Taylor, Mildred D.	1943
14	Armstrong, William H.	1914
	Stanford, John	1938
15	dePaola, Tomie	1934
	Marino, Dan	1961
16	Dahl, Roald	1916
	Gates, Henry Louis, Jr.	1950
17	Burger, Warren	1907
18	de Mille, Agnes	1905
	Fields, Debbi	1956
19	Delany, Sadie	1889
21	Fielder, Cecil	1963
	King, Stephen	1947
	Nkrumah, Kwame	1909
22	Richardson, Dot	1961
23	Nevelson, Louise	1899
24	Ochoa, Severo	1905
25	Gwaltney, John Langston	1928
	Locklear, Heather	1961
	Lopez, Charlotte	1976
	Pippen, Scottie	1965
	Reeve, Christopher	1952
	Smith, Will	1968
	Walters, Barbara	1931
26	Mandela, Winnie	1934
	Stockman, Shawn	1972
27	Handford, Martin	1956
28	Cray, Seymour	1925
29	Berenstain, Stan	1923
	Guey, Wendy	1983
	Gumbel, Bryant	1948
30	Hingis, Martina	1980
	Moceanu, Dominique	1981

October		Year
1	Carter, Jimmy	1924
	McGwire, Mark	1963
2	Leibovitz, Annie	1949
3	Campbell, Neve	1973
	Herriot, James	1916
	Richardson, Kevin	1972
	Winfield, Dave	1951
4	Cushman, Karen	1941
	Rice, Anne	1941
5	Fitzhugh, Louise	1928
	Hill, Grant	1972
	Lemieux, Mario	1965
	Lin, Maya	1959
	Winslet, Kate	1975

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6	Lobo, Rebecca	1973
7	Ma, Yo-Yo	1955
8	Jackson, Jesse	1941
	Ringgold, Faith	1930
	Stine, R.L.	1943
	Winans, CeCe	1964
9	Bryan, Zachery Ty	1981
	Senghor, Léopold Sédar	1906
10	Favre, Brett	1969
	Saro-Wiwa, Ken	1941
11	Perry, Luke	?1964
	Young, Steve	1961
12	Childress, Alice	?1920
	Ward, Charlie	1970
13	Carter, Chris	1956
	Kerrigan, Nancy	1969
	Rice, Jerry	1962
14	Daniel, Beth	1956
	Mobutu Sese Seko	1930
15	Iacocca, Lee A.	1924
16	Stewart, Kordell	1972
17	Jemison, Mae	1956
18	Foreman, Dave	1946
	Marsalis, Wynton	1961
	Navratilova, Martina	1956
	Suzuki, Shinichi	1898
20	Kenyatta, Jomo	?1891
	Mantle, Mickey	1931
	Pinsky, Robert	1940
21	Gillespie, Dizzy	1956
22	Hanson, Zac	1985
23	Crichton, Michael	1942
	Pelé	1940
26	Clinton, Hillary Rodham	1947
27	Anderson, Terry	1947
28	Gates, Bill	1955
	Salk, Jonas	1914
29	Ryder, Winona	1971
31	Candy, John	1950
	Paterson, Katherine	1932
	Pauley, Jane	1950

November		Year
2	lang, k.d.	1961
3	Arnold, Roseanne	1952
4	Combs, Sean (Puff Daddy)	1969
	Handler, Ruth	1916
8	Mittermeier, Russell A.	1949
9	Denton, Sandi	
	Sagan, Carl	1934
10	Bates, Daisy	?1914
11	DiCaprio, Leonardo	1974
	Vonnegut, Kurt	1922
12	Andrews, Ned	1980
	Blackmun, Harry	1908
	Harding, Tonya	1970
	Sosa, Sammy	1968
13	Goldberg, Whoopi	1949
14	Boutros-Ghali, Boutros	1922
	Hussein, King	1935
15	O'Keeffe, Georgia	1887
16	Baiul, Oksana	1977
17	Fuentes, Daisy	1966
	Hanson, Ike	1980
18	Driscoll, Jean	1966
	Mankiller, Wilma	1945
19	Devers, Gail	1966
	Glover, Savion	1973
	Strug, Kerri	1977
21	Aikman, Troy	1966
	Griffey, Ken, Jr.	1969
	Speare, Elizabeth George	1908
24	Ndeti, Cosmas	1971
25	Grant, Amy	1960
	Thomas, Lewis	1913
26	Patrick, Ruth	1907
	Pine, Elizabeth Michele	1975
	Schulz, Charles	1922
27	Nye, Bill	1955
	White, Jaleel	1977
29	L'Engle, Madeleine	1918
	Lewis, C. S.	1898
	Tubman, William V. S.	1895
30	Jackson, Bo	1962
	Parks, Gordon	1912

December		Year
2	Macaulay, David	1946
	Seles, Monica	1973
	Watson, Paul	1950
3	Filipovic, Zlata	1980
7	Bird, Larry	1956
8	Rivera, Diego	1886
12	Bialik, Mayim	1975
	Frankenthaler, Helen	1928
	Sinatra, Frank	1915
13	Fedorov, Sergei	1969
14	Jackson, Shirley	1916
15	Aidid, Mohammed Farah	1934
	Mendes, Chico	1944

December (continued)		Year
16	Bailey, Donovan	1967
	McCary, Michael	1971
	Mead, Margaret	1901
17	Kielburger, Craig	1982
18	Aguilera, Christina	1980
	Holmes, Katie	1978
	Pitt, Brad	1964
	Sanchez Vicario, Arantxa	1971
	Spielberg, Steven	1947
19	Morrison, Sam	1936
	White, Reggie	1961
20	Uchida, Mitsuko	1948
21	Evert, Chris	1954
	Griffith Joyner, Florence	1959
22	Pinkney, Jerry	1939
23	Avi	1937
	Harbaugh, Jim	1963
24	Martin, Ricky	1971
25	Sadat, Anwar	1918
26	Butcher, Susan	1954
27	Roberts, Cokie	1943
28	Lee, Stan	1922
	Washington, Denzel	1954
30	Woods, Tiger	1975

205

Biography Today

General Series

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- Authors
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- Sports figures
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- Cartoonists
- Scientists
- Astronauts
- TV personalities
- and the movers & shakers in many other fields!

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- 3 softcover issues, 6" x 9"
- Published in January, April, and September
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- 150 pages per issue
- 10-12 profiles per issue
- Contact sources for additional information
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- Published in December
- $56 per volume
- 450 pages per volume
- 30-36 profiles — includes all profiles found in softcover issues for that calendar year
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- Special appendix features current updates of previous profiles

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Larry Bird
Judy Blume
Berke Breathed
Garth Brooks
Barbara Bush
George Bush
Fidel Castro
Bill Clinton
Bill Cosby
Diana, Princess of Wales
Shannen Doherty
Elizabeth Dole
David Duke
Gloria Estefan
Mikhail Gorbachev
Steffi Graf
Wayne Gretzky
Matt Groening
Alex Haley
Hammer
Martin Handford
Stephen Hawking
Hulk Hogan
Saddam Hussein
Lee Iacocca
Bo Jackson
Mae Jemison
Peter Jennings
Steven Jobs
Pope John Paul II
Magic Johnson
Michael Jordon
Jackie Joyner-Kersee
Spike Lee
Mario Lemieux
Madeleine L'Engle
Jay Leno
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Jason Priestley
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Yitzhak Rabin
Sally Ride
Pete Rose
Nolan Ryan
H. Norman Schwarzkopf
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Dr. Seuss
Gloria Steinem
Clarence Thomas
Chris Van Allsburg
Cynthia Voigt
Bill Watterson
Robin Williams
Oprah Winfrey
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Boris Yeltsin

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Maya Angelou
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Avi
Kathleen Battle
Candice Bergen
Boutros Boutros-Ghali
Chris Burke
Dana Carvey
Cesar Chavez
Henry Cisneros
Hillary Rodham Clinton
Jacques Cousteau
Cindy Crawford
Macaulay Culkin
Lois Duncan
Marian Wright Edelman
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k.d. lang
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Rigoberta Menchu
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Jerry Rice
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Denzel Washington
Keenen Ivory Wayans
Dave Winfield

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Mario Andretti
Ned Andrews
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Bruce Babbitt
Mayim Bialik
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John Candy
Mary Chapin Carpenter
Benjamin Chavis
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Elizabeth Pine
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Steve Young
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Rush Limbaugh
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Joe Montana
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Mary-Kate Olsen
Jennifer Parkinson
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Wilma Rudolph
Salt 'N' Pepa
Barry Sanders
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Elizabeth George Speare
Dr. Benjamin Spock
Jonathan Taylor Thomas
Vicki Van Meter
Heather Whitestone
Pedro Zamora

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Boyz II Men
Brandy
Ron Brown
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Jim Carrey
Larry Champagne III
Christo
Chelsea Clinton
Coolio
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David Duchovny
Debbie Fields
Chris Galeczka
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Christopher Pike
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Dennis Rodman
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Monica Seles
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Kerri Strug
Tiffani-Amber Thiessen
Dave Thomas
Jaleel White

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Gillian Anderson
Rachel Blanchard
Zachery Ty Bryan
Adam Ezra Cohen
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Louis Farrakhan
Ella Fitzgerald
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Bryant Gumbel
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Michael Johnson
Maya Lin
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John Madden
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Pete Sampras
Pat Schroeder
Rebecca Sealfon
Tupac Shakur
Tabitha Soren
Herbert Tarvin
Merlin Tuttle
Mara Wilson

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Neve Campbell
Sean Combs (Puff Daddy)
Dalai Lama (Tenzin Gyatso)
Diana, Princess of Wales
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Livan Hernandez
Jewel
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David Hampton
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Ricky Martin
John McCain
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CeCe Winans

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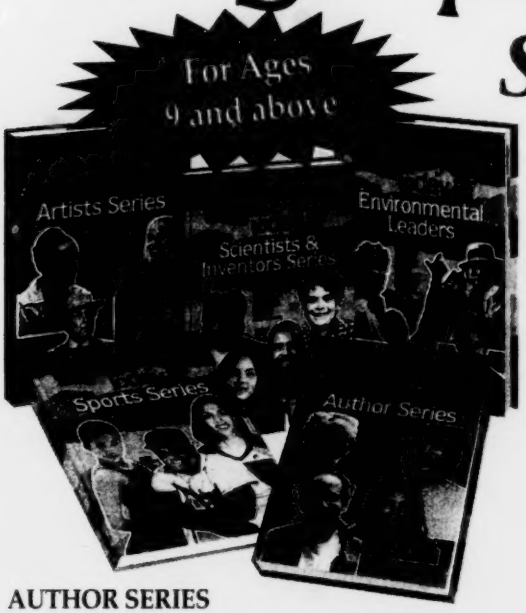

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"A useful tool for children's assignment needs." — *School Library Journal*

"The prose is workmanlike: report writers will find enough detail to begin sound investigations, and browsers are likely to find someone of interest." — *School Library Journal*

Scientists & Inventors Series

"The articles are readable, attractively laid out, and touch on important points that will suit assignment needs. Browsers will note the clear writing and interesting details." — *School Library Journal*

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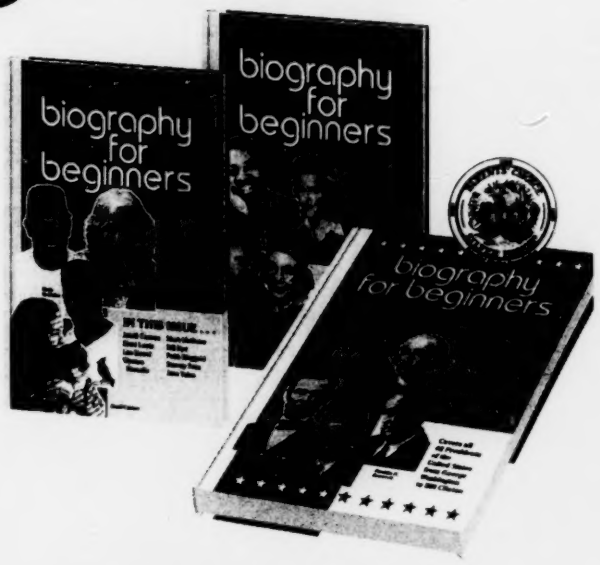

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- TV & film stars
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Mother Teresa
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Jane Yolen

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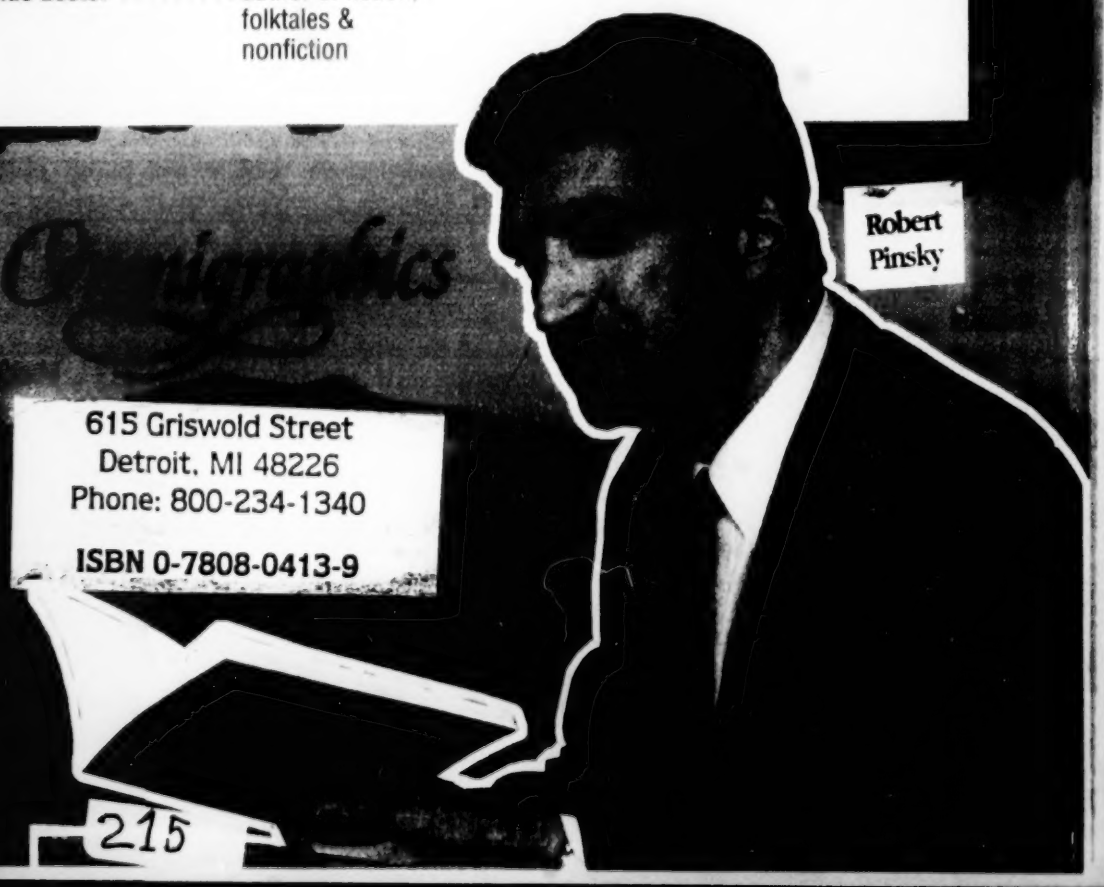
Jane Yolen . . . . . fairy tale & fantasy writer



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ISBN 0-7808-0413-9

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